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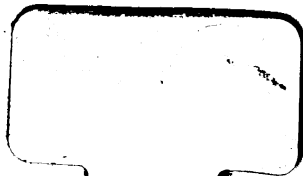
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THE WARE CASE

George Pleydell

KD 10410



Dec. 15. 1928

THE WARE CASE

GEORGE PLEYDELL

THE WARE CASE

BY
GEORGE PLEYDELL



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THE WARE CASE

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CHAPTER I

IT was a charming place, Wilbury; and soon after luncheon on one of those early hot autumn days, which surely are intended to make the world happier, but which Englishmen, in their quest of a grievance, frequently resent, any hidden trespasser upon the estate, who chanced to look towards the door-window of the library, would have seen an exceptionally beautiful young woman dash out distractedly upon the terrace alone. She was wearing an exquisitely cut white dress. Its taste was faultless. Its lines were charming. It was worn to perfection.

No head-gear hid her hair, which glittered brilliantly under a tropical sun. It was not golden hair in the conventional sense of the word, but golden streaks were intertwined with dark brown shades. When the light was on it it was dazzling.

Many kindly disposed women in discussing it with other kindly disposed women would sum it up pat in three words: "Dyed, my dear." Some even, with one of those charitable smiles which do not show the teeth, would hazard the question to her charmingly: "What *do* you use, dearest? *Do* tell me."

But the owner of this head of hair, who was the owner also of a sense of humour, would just bite her very pretty full lip, and answer with a most attractive chuckle: "Nothing"—another chuckle—"Why?" And she would be speaking the truth. It was real. Everything about her was real.

She did not remain upon the terrace. She was restless, agitated. With a quick, furtive look behind her to make sure that no one followed, she hurriedly descended some old

pink steps which led down to a lawn. Once there she hesitated, and sank down upon a garden seat which was shaded by a thick tree. Her elbows rested on her knees, and her delicately moulded chin dug firmly into her two small clenched fists. Her large, dark, grey-blue eyes looked out in front of her at *nothing*. They never appeared to blink. Two big tears seemed to wedge them open. Except for a hopeless rocking of her body from side to side the beautiful white figure remained like this for some minutes—quite still. Had the imaginary trespasser been real and come close to her, at that moment she would not have seen him. She was very far from Wilbury where, basking in the sunshine of that day, all things except human things were happy. Parent birds, although no longer in the fullness of their song, chirped merrily. Their young were learning to fly. Butterflies flirted joyously. The buzz of insects never stopped. All things except human things were happily mated.

Myriads of flowers threw up their scent to the heavens in thanks for the rain in the night. And the rose, for ever the monarch of them all, stood forth erect majestically.

But we mortals are strangely constructed beings. If we are unhappy, very often our melancholy is not improved by the sight of other people's gaiety. Their good luck jars upon us. Not seldom we are apt to resent it.

Some such thought just then crossed the mind of the silent figure in white. It was the fault of a young blackbird who, after a deal of hesitation, at length made up his mind to risk a flight from a sweet-briar hedge, about twenty yards off, to the tree above the garden seat. He did it successfully, and there was a shrill cluck of triumph in his voice, which was responded to joyfully by an older bird close by.

"I can't bear it," was the exclamation conveyed by the sudden movement of the woman's body. She sprang to her feet abruptly, and almost ran away from the tree until she reached the park beyond the gardens. Once there she lingered for some seconds. But the insects' love-song burst forth again, and she seemed to think that the only way to avoid the sound was to keep on moving.

Nothing stopped her. Almost as if some one were in pursuit she sought the refuge of some trees near a lake. She threaded her way through the bracken, kicking it impatiently as she went, until, coming upon a broken bough, she sat down upon it in precisely the same attitude as she had adopted in the garden. But this time, as she gazed out blankly in front of her, her eyes fell upon the water. And anyone watching her then would have noticed that she *saw* it. It arrested her. It was real. The sun was beating down upon it. It shimmered wonderfully. It was deep a few yards out. It attracted her. It absorbed her. She was deaf to the insects. She was blind to every living, moving thing around her. Nothing was there but the lake.

For some time she did not stir. She was in the act of making up her mind. A great grief encircled her. This could end it. It would hurt, she thought. But only for a moment. It would hurt nobody else. Was it cowardly? She did not know. She was beyond caring. She stood up slowly and faced the water. Resolution was written large upon a beautiful young face. She walked deliberately towards the edge. She reached it firmly. In another second she would have left the bank, and the world would have been the poorer. But at that very moment there broke forth suddenly upon the still air the clanging of some church bells. They were ringing uproariously for a village wedding. They were some distance off, but the stretch of water, lying between them and the solitary figure in white, made them sound loudly. She heard them with a start, and, placing her hands to her ears, her face was distorted with pain. She raised her head in an agony, and her eyes, as she opened them, looked towards a hill where a little old church nestled among the gravestones. Some of these were green with age, too old for any descendant to give a casual thought to. Visitors even would raise their voices when they approached them. A few were newer and cleaner, still worth a posy or two. Others had only recently been placed there. They were very white in the sun. Many of them were nearly hidden by flowers. They were young enough to be remembered, and passers-by spoke in a whisper.

The figure in white took a quick step back as she gazed towards the little grey steeple. Then, with a violent lifting of her shoulders, she covered her face with her hands, and for some minutes sobbed bitterly. She turned her eyes once more upon the distant hill, and the look of resolution, just now planted so firmly upon her face, melted away into a look of love and remorse. What had she seen upon the hill?

In another moment she was running away from the water.

CHAPTER II

SUCH a tragedy, so near completion, was strangely out of keeping with an attractive property like Wilbury. It was a fascinating Elizabethan house of considerable size, with modern luxurious appointments—a delightful blend of the sixteenth and twentieth centuries, genuine old oak beams and panelling being on excellent terms with a private installation of electric light, and certain of the smaller rooms, with their quaint windows, resignedly submitting to the intrusion of the most up-to-date porcelain baths.

It was a perfectly equipped house, suggesting wealth in every nook. Estate agents, probably, would advertize it as "This exceptional mansion." Certainly they would call it desirable; possibly unique. And in their choice of adjectives they would not unnaturally be influenced by its surroundings.

It was ideally placed in a beautiful old timbered park. There were tastefully laid out gardens. The connoisseur would detect the master hand of the Scotch gardener everywhere. The kitchen-garden could be painted only by Parsons. The flower gardens, with their tennis courts and croquet lawns, their sundials and roughly paved paths with grass popping up between the joints, would be a joy to Marcus Stone. And on the other side, to the west, there was the large lake which the beautiful figure in white had rushed to for release. It was, indeed, a most attractive feature of the estate. It was not formal or artificial looking, but apparently responsible to nature alone. It was bounded almost entirely by luxuriant foliage. Grand old oaks,—just the hiding-places for Elizabethan ruffs or Stuart frills,—fine planes, lofty elms, rich chestnuts pink and white, dark cedars and weeping willows were plentiful. Thick bracken, almost to the water's edge, was everywhere. And the smell of the moss was good.

The lake was not much less than half a mile long. Its southern end came to within a hundred yards of the house, but was quite hidden from the windows by the great trees and the high banks of rhododendrons surrounding it. In fact a visitor would only discover the use this end had been put to when he reached it. There, if he was a swimmer, he would find to his delight a well fitted bathing-shed, with a spring-board for the header-taker and steps for the timid. If he was energetic the choice of two rowing skiffs would attract him. If he was a flirt, a punt. Apart from these modern additions to the lake, it had, even when the sun was out, a strangely deserted and silent atmosphere about it. At twilight or under the stars it could look very cruel. Some products of the twentieth century afflicted with nerves or an "itis" of some kind would not like it. They would label it creepy, and imagine that many an Elizabethan drama had been enacted in it.

Be that as it may, as likely as not you will be wondering why such importance should be attached to the existence of such a lake. Quite right. Many estates possess them. There is nothing very startling in a stretch of water although it may be half a mile long. There are many such in various parts of England. But this is the point. This particular lake was only twelve miles from London, in the County of Middlesex. That is a fact assuredly which Giddy & Giddy would not overlook were Wilbury in the market.

But it was not. And while the figure in white was contemplating the water, within three hundred yards of her, in the garden, games of lawn tennis were being strenuously played and thoroughly enjoyed by the friends and relatives of this tortured soul, and indoors every one was pursuing a normal existence.

Marston Gurney entered the charming library, took up a packet of stamped letters from the table, and rang the bell. He was a well dressed, fresh-looking young Englishman of twenty-five, and admirably filled the post of private secretary to Sir Hubert Ware, the owner of Wilbury.

"Did you ring, sir?"

The question came from a tall, somewhat pompous-look-

ing, middle-aged butler, who asked the most commonplace questions with a pained expression.

"Yes, Rate," replied Gurney, as he handed him the packet, "these letters of Sir Hubert's for the post."

"I beg pardon, sir, but I thought I might talk more free like to you, sir, as Sir Hubert's secretary, than I could to Sir Hubert."

"Well?"

"There's been a discussion in the servants' 'all, sir, about a rumour what's got spread."

"A rumour, Rate?" asked Gurney, eyeing the butler's very cadaverous expression with some comic curiosity.

"Yes, sir, but it's probably only one of those petty country rumours. London's too big for them, sir," answered Rate with considerable contempt.

"What is the rumour?"

"That Sir Hubert's obliged to sell Wilbury, sir"; and he added quickly, on noticing a look of impatience cross Gurney's face, "I wouldn't have presumed to put the question, sir, if I hadn't thought my own position and the wife's —"

"Was insecure?" interrupted the young secretary. "You may make your mind easy, Rate. Your position, so far as I know, hasn't even been mentioned."

"I see, sir. Thank you, sir," replied a very disappointed, crestfallen-looking man, who until then had regarded his position of butler and his wife's of housekeeper as of some importance.

Gurney lighted a cigarette, and over the burning match watched, with a twinkle in his eye, the very stiff, eloquent back of the butler as he retreated across the large room towards the door. He expected a dignified exit of the man there and then, but he was disappointed.

On the threshold of the hall Rate stopped and turned.

"I hope, sir, you'll excuse the liberty of my asking that question," he said.

"Of course, of course," replied Gurney, puffing out a cloud of smoke to hide his amusement.

"I only did so, sir, because Sir Hubert and her ladyship

have hitherto extended to me the greatest consideration."

"I quite understand, Rate, quite."

"Other masters and mistresses, sir, may treat their servants different, but here, sir, at Wilbury and in Bruton Street, I have never been looked upon as a mere syphon in the house."

Gurney, biting his lips, thought silence the safest plan, and the butler, completely satisfied with his command of the King's English, passed out.

"Don't shut the door, Rate. It's too hot," called out Gurney, just stopping him in time.

He was now alone in the room. After a hearty laugh at Rate's expense he left the handsome Chippendale writing-table, against which he had been leaning, and, as if at a loss what to do, examined aimlessly the beautifully bound books which surrounded the library, and extended from the floor to a height of ten feet.

It was a very hot day as we know, but Marston Gurney was too young and too thin to feel it as he did. He blew out his cheeks and mopped his brow, and greedily snatched up "The Sportsman" which was lying on an exquisite Adams sofa. Apparently he had forgotten that only a couple of hours ago he had devoured the whole paper, and could quote the price of every horse.

He then threw it aside, and, hurrying to a small whatnot table near the fireplace, he referred to a particular page of "The Racing Calendar" for the hundredth time.

The telephone on the writing-table rang. It could not possibly be news of the St. Leger, which was to be run to-day. It was too early yet. But young Gurney rushed to the receiver, and answered the call feverishly.

"Hallo! Hallo!—Yes, this is Sir Hubert Ware's house.—No, I'm his secretary, Mr. Gurney—Gurney, yes. Who is it speaking?—Oh, Mr. Ingleworth, Sir Hubert's stock-broker. Oh—h!"

He was disappointed, and his tone became dull.

"Well, can I give him your message?—Yes, I do happen to know something about the matter."

Gurney started.

"Serious, you say. Just wait one moment, will you, Mr. Ingleworth?"

He threw his cigarette away and caught sight of the open door by which Rate had left, and thinking that the butler's morals might possibly not be sounder than the butler's English, closed it prudently.

"Are you there?" he inquired quietly through the telephone again.

"Yes — Yes — Yes — and the total sum?"

The receiver jerked in his hand.

"Serious as that? — er — couldn't it be carried over again to the next account? — Not possible? — I see, yes. — I'll repeat your message after you. — 'Sir Hubert must settle the account by Thursday or prompt action will be taken.' Is that right? — Very well. — Good-bye."

He rang off, and looked out in front of him thoughtfully.

So thoughtful was he for some moments that he did not hear a tennis shoe step into the room through the door-window behind him just after he had hung up the receiver. If he had been aware of it, this strong, manly young fellow would not have been too pleased.

It was a pale and overdressed youth of twenty who came in. His immaculate flannels fitted him too well. The trouser-crease was too straight, the turn-up was too accurate. The white shoes were too white. The waist of the jacket was too wasp-like. The light racquet of thirteen ounces, which he held, was too heavy for him. His name was Eustace Ede.

"Hallo, Marston," he squeaked out in a high-pitched tone as he reached Gurney's side, "you look a bit glum. What's up?"

"Nothing," was the flat answer. "Finished your tennis, Eustace?"

"It's nearly finished me," replied the youth, petulantly. "I simply can't serve, and never shall. And, then, playing with girls means that on an insufferably hot day you have to hunt for all the balls, and clamber through beastly dirty wire-netting. I believe that wife of yours sent them out on purpose. It's damnable for one's flannels. I say, Marston," he added, turning himself round, "am I filthy?"

"Awful," said Gurney, with a mischievous laugh.

"Then I must go and change."

"Rot, you blighter! I was only coddling. But I say, if you *could* get a smear or two of the earth on you it wouldn't hurt you. That's what you want, Eustace—to be made a man of."

"Well, I don't approve of tennis with your wife as a means to that end. Besides, I simply abominate anything to do with bats or clubs."

Gurney looked at him contemptuously, and with difficulty kept his right foot still. No, that would not do, he thought. To kick the brother of Lady Ware, his charming hostess, would be quite indefensible. He controlled himself, and fell back upon a chaffing mood.

"Had your bathe yet?" he inquired of Eustace, being certain of a negative answer.

"No, I have not. There's another hateful amusement—bathing."

"Well, anyhow we've taught you to swim a bit. I believe at a pinch you might manage thirty yards."

"Yes, in this horrid lake here," replied the boy, wriggling his body in his too well fitting clothes.

"But I say, Eustace," said Gurney, with a distinct tone of real regret in his voice, "what's going to happen to you when you come into all your property? What sort of figure are you going to cut? And you've not much time to pull yourself together, you know."

"Oh, yes, I know all about that," squeaked Ede.

"In six months you'll be of age and heir to—to your father's fortune, you lucky devil."

"Lucky, is it? I don't know so much about that. I'm certain it'll all be an infernal worry. No, Marston, my sister Magdalen is the lucky one. She just has all she needs, and—"

"Lady Ware deserves all the luck of the world," exclaimed Gurney, warmly.

"Well, and hasn't she got it? To be five years older than me, and yet to escape this infernal inheritance, and all the

fuss and bother I know it's going to cause me. And she would have managed it all so much better than I shall."

Gurney, without speaking, was of the same opinion, and wished with all his heart that she had the chance.

"What the gov'nor was about when he made his will I don't know."

"Nor do I," came sarcastically from the other.

Eustace looked up surprised, with an expression of some pleasure.

"You're of the same opinion!" he exclaimed. "Thanks, Marston. That's the first remark I've made to-day that any one's agreed with. Ever since breakfast you've all been stinging liking a lot of beastly —!"

He uttered a sudden cry of fright, and with his handkerchief beat the air in terror.

"Wasps! Wasps!" he yelled as he screwed himself up in fear, "I hate them! I hate them! Take the brute away, Marston!"

"Not for worlds," laughed Gurney.

Eustace ran from the wasp in a panic.

"I say what a funk you are!" he cried. "Now you shall see that *I'm* not afraid."

"I should like to see that."

The wasp settled at last close to a cigar box upon a small table. The courage of the anæmic youth became enormous.

"He's stopped there, the wretch," he whispered, as he pointed to the table. Now! He approached the writing-table cautiously, and picked up a small china vase.

"See that?" he asked, holding it out weakly.

Gurney nodded.

"Now for 'im!" the boy said excitedly in a hushed tone.

Slowly on tiptoe he approached the small table with the vase which, with a very nervous hand, he placed over the wasp. He sprang away from it in triumph, and applauded himself childishly. Darwin alone could have accounted for his laugh.

"There! What do you think of that? I've got him! I've got him! Hee! Hee! Hee!"

"Got what?" broke in the singularly musical voice of a beautiful young woman who came into the room from the hall, and whose entrance was the signal for Marston Gurney to rise immediately from an easy chair into which, from sheer boredom, he had tumbled in company with "Form in a Nutshell."

"Only a wasp, Lady Ware," answered Gurney, with a smile.

"Only a wasp! I like that," squeaked Eustace. "He's been trying to sting me, Magda, trying all he knew."

"And did he succeed?" asked Magdalen quietly as she joined Gurney.

"No, not he. I've got him safe enough too," replied Eustace proudly as he bent his ear to the vase, and listened for some time delightedly to the buzzing efforts at escape.

"Where's Celia?" was Magdalen's next question.

"She's been playing tennis with Eustace the last half hour."

"Only been married to her four months, and you actually lose sight of her for half an hour!"

"I had some letters of Sir Hubert's to attend to," said Gurney, with a laugh.

"I see," she added, with one of those long, slow nods that mean teasing.

But Marston Gurney, like almost every one else, would take anything from Lady Ware. There was great beauty about her and real charm. She was privileged wherever she went. No one could pass her in the road without turning round. No man could remain seated while she was standing. And withal, she was essentially a feminine woman. Her dress was feminine; it never slavishly followed any fashion, but it was always just right. In fact you could put any commonplace article of clothing upon her, and she invariably would give something to it. It was the art of wearing clothes. It was distinction. It was herself. And you always somehow could feel sure that what was invisible about her was quite as *soignée* as that which met the eye. Her movements were feminine. Indeed her simple dignity of carriage formed a striking contrast to the loutish "roll" affected

by many English girls of the twentieth century. In Bond Street that "roll" is hideous enough, but when surrounded by Parisians in the Rue de la Paix it assumes an international importance, and dangerously imperils the *Entente Cordiale*.

Her tastes were feminine. Very properly she liked to have pretty things around her. She had an eye for colour, and it pleased her to place two tints side by side, which, to the conventional mind, should never occupy the same room, and make them agree successfully. Pleasant scents appealed to her. The perfumes she bought were never pungent. They made you no more than just conscious of their presence. Her character was feminine, and it was strong. Endowed by nature with beauty and charm she could have had the whole world grovelling had she chosen, but she preferred detachment, and only cared for the society of a few close friends whom she picked most carefully. She was rather vehement in her likes and dislikes. She loathed a snob.

In religion she was unorthodox. She was only five and twenty, but she had a mind that could think for itself. As to the thousand and one forms of religion, they one and all had good in them to her way of thinking.

The prayers she uttered were her own, and they were very short and to the point. On Sundays she went to church irregularly, but she led a good life through the week. Cant and humbug she detested. A goody-goody person she never saw twice. No published charity-lists included her name. Her benefactions were anonymous and liberal. But her greatest quality of all was endurance. You may wonder whether it could have been tested adequately at the age of twenty-five. But experience sometimes can grip the young. And an observant person, looking into Magdalen's face, would have read something there. It would have been difficult to explain, but it was there. It did not detract from her beauty; indeed it enhanced it; it seemed to give it strength. It was a wonderful face and very uncommon. Its expression was extraordinarily varied. It was never the same two seconds together. A sudden humorous twinkle in

a pair of brilliant eyes, and a twist of a rather crooked mouth, would chase away a look of grief in a flash.

She was the antithesis of her brother Eustace. In fact, regarding the two at this moment, the one serene and beautiful, the other stupid and malicious as he contemplated the destruction of the wasp, it was difficult to realize their close relationship.

And there was Magdalen in that room completely self-possessed, uttering the most ordinary commonplaces, outwardly taking an interest in the most humdrum concerns of other people, while not many minutes ago she stood alone with a sorrow upon the edge of the lake.

"There you are, Magdalen," exclaimed delightedly a pretty girl of small stature as she came through the door-window with a racquet and tennis-ball in her hand. "I've been looking for you in the garden. Where have you been?"

"Up in my room, Celia," was the calm reply.

Celia, who had been absent from her new husband for the enormous length of half an hour, joined Marston Gurney like a dutiful wife.

"Now I'm going to finish him," said Eustace devilishly, drawing nearer to the china vase with a lighted cigarette in a very long tube.

"Please don't stamp on him, Eustace. Ugh! I hate that scrunching sound," entreated Magdalen, with her fingers to her ears.

"I never stamp on 'em," answered her brother.

"Hasn't got the pluck, the rotter," whispered Celia to Gurney.

"I have a much more artistic method," giggled Eustace, "I let 'em die slowly by nicotine poison. Just look! You'll see him all stupefied in a moment."

He took a long draw at his cigarette, very cautiously lifted up one side of the vase, blew into it a thick puff of smoke, and then again completely covered the wasp with the vase.

"There! Who's afraid? I'll give him another go directly," said the boy as he swaggered stupidly towards Gurney.

"Oh, no, you won't," protested Magdalen firmly, as she lifted up the vase and set the wasp free.

"I say, Magdalen, what's it got to do with you?" shouted Eustace in a rage.

"You're cruel," she replied. "You seem to take a fiendish delight in torturing anything which chances to be even more insignificant than yourself."

"That's a nice sisterly remark, a very nice sisterly remark."

Some colour at last came into the cheeks of the boy, and Marston and Celia, possessed of an average amount of tact, strolled out of the library to the terrace.

Magdalen at that moment did not feel disposed to spare this young brother.

"Isn't a sister generally about the only person who does tell her brother what she thinks of him?" she asked quietly.

"Look here, stop that tone of yours, will you?" yelled Eustace.

"It's inconceivable that you're nearly twenty-one, and coming into a large estate."

"Damn it! I don't want to come into it. It's only going to be a beastly worry to me, I know that, and I hate to be worried."

Magdalen moved away from him with an exclamation of impatience and a contemptuous toss of her head.

"Stop a bit, though," he continued, "I believe that's just the reason why you and I don't hit it off."

"What do you mean?" she asked, looking straight into his face.

"I mean that I think you're jealous; yes, beastly jealous. You're older than me, and think *you* ought to have it. That's what you think!"

Her look was withering. Hers was indeed one of those minds through which a mean thought had seldom passed. She remained silent, and regarded him steadily.

"Well, then, I'm one up on you at last, Magdalen," he spluttered furiously. "You can't touch a penny of it till I'm done with. You've just got to wait for my death before you come into it. That's what you've got to do, yes. And

as you have five years' start of me the law of nature will probably provide for your hooking it first."

"Eustace, you're making yourself rather ridiculous. Go and bathe; you'll feel better then."

The boy stamped his foot in impotent rage, while his sister quietly seated herself in an easy chair.

"Look out! There's another wasp," laughed out Celia as she entered from the terrace with Marston.

"Where? Where?" shrieked Eustace in terror.

"On your back," she answered, taking a good aim with a tennis-ball at his shoulders, and laughing merrily.

"You're sickening, all of you, sickening!" he cried as he stalked foolishly out of the room.

"Poor Eustace!" said Magdalen. "What a shame it was not to give him a better chance. No public school. It's awfully sad."

She looked at the others seriously.

"Now, you two. I have something to say to you. Celia, be an angel, will you? and bring me my work from the sofa."

"Is it as serious as that?" Gurney asked, with a smile.

Magdalen looked at him inquiringly.

"Whenever you have anything particularly serious to say you always fly to your work."

"No; do I?" she said gently.

Celia brought the needlework to her.

"My waistcoat, by Jove!" exclaimed Gurney. "What a brick you are!"

"Nonsense," answered Magdalen under her breath.

"It isn't nonsense," Celia declared, as she took her hand.

"We owe everything to you, Marston and I."

"I owe Celia to you, I know that," rejoined Gurney.

"Why, we couldn't have married for I don't how long if I hadn't become Sir Hubert's secretary, and had had to go on waiting at the Bar for the wretched briefs that never came."

"And now I'm going to hurt you both, I know," Magdalen almost whispered. "Things — things —" She suffered acutely in trying to put it gently. "Things have been going badly with us for some time, and I'm afraid Hubert will have to give up having a secretary."

There was a pause. The beautiful grey-blue eyes were full of tears, the delicately rounded chin was shaking, and Celia, with her arms round her neck, kissed her tenderly. That embrace showed very clearly how complete was the sympathy between those two.

"But you understand, don't you?" continued Magdalen, with a sure look at the young man.

"Understand?" Gurney answered sympathetically, remembering the confidential telephone message from the stock-broker. "I'm only wretched at feeling you are troubled, Lady Ware."

And he was sincere. He really was only thinking of her anxieties. It barely crossed his mind at that moment that his loss of the secretaryship was a serious matter for him and Celia. He merely was reflecting upon the gravity of the Wares' position which the telephone message, in conjunction with other knowledge in his secret possession, made clear. He wanted to take a convenient opportunity to communicate that message to Sir Hubert Ware. And he walked up to the window thoughtfully.

"Is Sir Hubert in the garden, Celia?" he asked.

"Yes, playing tennis with Sir Henry Egerton. Sir Henry walked over just now."

"Oh, I see."

The news, he thought, could keep for half an hour.

"Everything will come right for you, I'm sure," said Magdalen, with a brave smile. "Don't worry more than you can help."

"No, of course not," he replied with a laugh. "I'll take up Christian Science at once."

"No, dear, no twaddle of that sort, I *don't* think," said Celia, with an emphatic shake of the head.

As the daughter of an orthodox clergyman she held certain views, though she could express them according to her generation.

"Christian Science, twaddle?" he exclaimed. "Why, just think of the comfort of it. You can change the colour of everything. Red's black — black's red."

"Never at Monte Carlo," Magdalen urged quickly.

The allusion to gambling changed his train of thought.

"I wonder what'll win the Leger to-day," he said with a nervous suddenness.

"A very open race, they say," answered Magdalen, looking at him suspiciously.

"Marston, no more of that, you villain!"

"Too late, Lady Ware. I had a tip from Egerton—"

"Sir Henry?" she asked with a smile.

"Yes, the chief of the Criminal Investigation Department is not always investigating. He sometimes picks out a good thing. He gave me 'Aeroplane,' and I backed him three days ago. I got thirty-three to one."

"Oh, I thought you'd done with all that at Oxford," said Magdalen.

"So I had. But I felt pretty reckless, and I feel worse to-day. I believe it'll win."

"Do you?" asked Celia, running to him excitedly.

"Could you—? Is there time to put something on for me?"

"Only at starting price."

"That's better than nothing! Do."

"I'll ask Egerton's advice."

The young fellow hurried out into the garden, and left the two friends alone. All three of them were natural human beings. The mind of each was, in fact, smitten by trouble. But at those moments relief appears in odd ways. To them it came in the form of a sudden turn of a serious conversation into the trivial topic of a horse-race hundreds of miles away. It is not an unkind provision of nature. Probably we should all go mad if we always stuck to the point.

Marston Gurney sought out Sir Hubert to give him the telephone message. But he was not destined to secure any private conversation with him just then. He found him playing an energetic single with Sir Henry Egerton. It was not, by the way, a very fair advantage to take of Egerton upon a very hot day. Ware, to start with, was twelve years his junior. He was only thirty-five, with a slim, graceful figure, and a handsome, clean-shaved face above it. Egerton was seven and forty, and had more flesh to carry. He was

a powerfully built man. But he was glad of a game with Ware. Scotland Yard had not allowed him enough exercise lately.

"Not a bad 'un that, eh, Marston?" said Ware, with a chuckle, giving Egerton an untakeable service.

"Hallo, Gurney!" called out Egerton. "That's five all, Ware."

"Long game or sudden death?" asked Ware gaily, as he sent the balls over to Egerton.

"Oh, the long game. Give me exercise," answered Egerton breathlessly, mopping his face.

"Right ho!"

Gurney crossed to Egerton's court, and took the opportunity to speak to him. "I say, Sir Henry, do you advise my wife to put a bit on 'Aeroplane'?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Egerton, absorbed in his game.

"Don't you let her lose her money, Marston," said Ware. "I tell you 'Blacksocks' will romp in."

Egerton went to the back line to serve, and the two men continued their set gamely.

Gurney watched them for a while, and joined presently in Ware's amusement when Egerton fell plump on his back in trying to reach a ball which just scraped over the net.

"Awfully sorry, Egerton," said Ware, shaking with laughter. "I am really."

Happiness and good spirits were personified in him.

"By Jove, what a ripping host he is!" thought Gurney as he strolled towards the house. "You'd think he hadn't a care in the world. And yet he *must* be infernally worried. Any way, I'm not going to trouble him now. I'll let the damned news wait."

CHAPTER III

UPON Gurney's departure from the room bets and other trivialities left the minds of the two young women.

Magdalen worked at the waistcoat inordinately fast, and Celia, by her side, watched her anxiously.

It was a charming picture they made. They were both pretty in their respective ways: Magdalen, with her exceptional golden-streaked hair, her beautiful face and her distinguished bearing, which was helped by a height considerably above the medium, forming an admirable contrast to Celia, who was *petite*, lively, and quick in movement, and the proud possessor of a little head as black as a coal, two dark brown eyes, and a fascinating, turn-up nose.

Yet from another point of view it was an ordinary picture. It was one that is being sat for three hundred and sixty-five days in every year: the confidences of two girl friends.

"I'm so sorry you're worried," Celia said. "Is it very serious, dear?"

Magdalen put down her work mechanically.

"It will mean doing something for a living," she answered steadily.

"Magda!"

"Wilbury will have to be sold. Bruton Street, too."

"Oh-h! But has Sir Hubert lost as heavily as that?"

"Practically everything."

"Everything!"

"He admitted as much about an hour ago in this room. There was a scene. But it isn't that he's lost," she continued, raising her voice slightly. "A wife can bear that, and she ought to bear it. But it's different from that, Celia—I've never told you this before—"

"What, dear?"

"What he hasn't gambled away he's squandered on—" She broke off huskily and walked across the room.

Celia was silent.

"You know what I mean, dear," at length continued Magdalen. "It's the story that's as old as the hills. I've been one of a number for years."

Celia looked at her friend aghast as she paced the room, and wondered how any man alive could throw a glance upon any other woman if once he had seen her.

Magdalen returned to her side and sat down again. Once more did she rest her elbows on her knees and her chin on her hands.

"I've been simply tramping about the grounds like a mad thing," she said.

"Oh, why didn't you come to me?" asked Celia, as she laid her hand tenderly on her arm.

"No," came the nervous answer. "It was one of those moments when you have to be alone; when you're on edge with everybody; and when you have to keep walking—walking away from something that's always catching you up."

"I know, dear," said the other gently.

"Oh, you *can't* know. It's a feeling that only comes to a woman who has made a mistake—a feeling of loathing for everything and everybody."

Celia grasped her hand.

"Yes, Celia, that was my feeling," she continued vehemently. "And these four years have been my training for it; ever since my marriage. That was the mistake I shall never be forgiven. I was let in for it, urged into it by my father. Ambition was his curse. Hubert, a baronet, rich, position, and all the rest of it. Not a thought as to happiness. That didn't count with my father. And if anyone mentioned it, it was always money that could buy it. Nothing else, he said. It was his Stock Exchange way of looking at things. If my mother had been alive it might have been different. When I hesitated to accept Hubert, my father told me of his will. I had to marry well, he said, because, apart from a small settlement on me, he was going to leave

everything to Eustace. Oh, he meant it well for me, I suppose, but he chivvied me into it when I was just twenty-one. Hubert was charming, handsome, and—well, I made the mistake I shall never be forgiven. I don't deserve to be. I oughtn't to have made it. You're not let off lightly for a mistake like that."

"It was a shame of your father. It wasn't your fault; I'm hanged if it was," said Celia stoutly.

"It was a mad act, mad—mad," answered Magdalen strongly; "and out in the park there I've been trying to run away from it. As if I could! It was only when I reached the far end of the lake that I saw a means of escape."

"Magda!" cried out Celia fearfully.

"It was the one spot which showed me a future."

"No, no, no! You shan't talk like that. You shan't think like it," the little friend exclaimed, with all the love in her body, as she held the beautiful woman by both shoulders and stared in to her great eyes.

"You darling!" whispered Magdalen tenderly, the corners of her mouth twisting up into a smile. "You have a dear face, you know."

"Oh, but it's a shame, Magda. It's wicked!" said Celia violently. And she walked across the room.

"Don't leave me, Celia!"

"Leave you!" answered the girl. "As if I'd leave you!"

"It's been a relief to talk."

"And you've kept all this to yourself, Magda. Why didn't you tell me before?"

"Oh, I don't know," Magdalen replied quietly, with a shrug of her shoulders. "Nothing could undo it. And to bore other people with one's troubles is rather a selfish business."

That was her youthful way of putting it. If she had been older, with the bloom of her charm faded, she might have argued more bitterly: that other people's love affairs are decidedly esoteric and vastly uninteresting; that to gain sympathy you must exhibit a gaping wound, or lean on a crutch, or go blind; but that compassion, fellow-feeling, forbearance

are rarely extended to mental suffering which must be kept to yourself religiously while you maintain to their full measure your reputation for high spirits and infectious laughter, your fame as a conversationalist, your renown as a wit, enduring your secret silently until it shatters you.

Celia, however, was a real exception to prove the rule.

"Fancy your talking about boring me," she said. "I call that perfectly horrid of you."

Gurney at that moment returned from the tennis court.

"Yes, Celia, Egerton still thinks 'Aeroplane's' all right," he whispered from the window rather nervously. "He's got a pile on it."

"And how much have you on?" inquired Celia, running to him.

Gurney looked decidedly cryptic.

"Nothing that I haven't got," was his cautious answer.

"I'll tell you when it's over. I've the chance of bringing off a fine coup like I did once up at Oxford. And I have an idea," he added, lowering his voice.

He took his wife by the arm and whispered something into her ear.

"Yes — yes!" said Celia, clapping her hands together excitedly.

Gurney looked at his watch.

"Now, if you want a bit on, I'll telephone from the hall at once," he said. "There's only just time."

He ran to the door, while Celia remained in an attitude of profound calculation.

"Marston!" she called, evidently screwing up her courage for a big effort. "Put a sovereign on for me."

"Right ho!" said Marston, and he paused like all tempters. "A fiver if you like!"

"Yes, a fiver, by Jove!" rattled out the girl, with a flushed face. "A fiver each way," she added, bringing down one small fist upon the other.

Gurney ran into the hall. And Celia returned to her friend with a pulse undoubtedly above the normal.

"You monkey, you!" said Magdalen. "Suppose you lose?"

"Well, I shall be let down, that's all. If I win I shall be bucked up."

"Celia, what's the best way for me to meet all this, I wonder?" Magdalen continued.

"Like a man," was the prompt reply. "Bravely."

"H'm! I knew you'd say that."

"And that's the way you're going to meet it, Magda."

"You think so?"

"I don't think at all. I'm certain."

"Why?"

"Why?" queried Celia confidently. "Simply because it's the only way worthy of you."

"You're a great dear, Celia. But you've only been married four months, and you think much too well of everybody."

"Not of *you*. I never could think too well of *you*," the girl said passionately, as she remarked a pained look cross her friend's face. "You are one of the rare souls who rise above things, however hard and bitter they may be."

"Oh, no, my dear, I'm not. I'm just an ordinary moral coward."

"Since when, I should like to know?" protested the little champion strongly. "You weren't when you were the big girl at school, and I was the tiny scrap."

"Ho! Ancient history, my dear. Times have changed. I wasn't married then," she added bitterly.

Celia knelt by her side, pressing both her hands in hers, and looked up into the two wonderful eyes.

"Magda, dear," she said steadily in a low voice, "you didn't become an ordinary moral coward two years ago."

Neither of them spoke for some seconds. Magdalen's eyes wandered away slowly from the girl's face, and seemed to gaze out through the wall of the room.

"Two years ago!" she said in a hushed tone.

"When your baby died," Celia went on, clinging to her hands. "That was a cruel wound, if you like — the deepest in the world, they say."

"It never heals."

"But you bore it, dearest, and you go on bearing it bravely. Yes, you do. I see it in your face very often."

"It's a set look in the mouth, isn't it? And a stare in the eyes when they gaze at the fire? It's not a pretty look, Celia."

"It's a grand look. Oh, Magda, what is this trouble now compared with that? The loss is so mean and small. It can be met somehow. It must be."

"But the cause of the loss, the humiliating cause of it, what of that?" asked Magdalen scornfully.

"Something will happen to make things better; I'm sure of it. Don't think I'm defending Sir Hubert. I'm not in the least. I loathe him for treating you like this. But he may be sorry. He may regret. He—"

"Ah!" was the quick interruption from Magdalen, who thought she knew her husband better.

"Still, dear, however great this trouble, it's not like the other. It can't be," urged Celia lovingly, as she pointed her finger towards the window. There's nothing in it to take you up the hill there to your baby's tiny broken column—"

"Celia!" cried out Magdalen. "He saved me just now. Yes, little Philip did. I was at the water's edge. The bells rang out suddenly from the hill. And I looked there. His tiny, white, broken column was lighted up by the sun. It saved me! It seemed to make me live again! If I were not here, there would be no one to look after it, no one to take a flower! It would become neglected and forgotten like the older ones! I couldn't bear the thought of that! I simply couldn't bear it, Celia!"

Her head fell upon her friend's shoulder. They were locked in each other's arms.

In another moment she looked up.

"If only I could cry!" she exclaimed piteously.

"We're quite alone. Why not?"

"I can't. I can't shed a tear."

"Now then, Magda, promise me something, will you?"

"What?"

"That you'll never think of doing that again."

There was a long interval of silence while the two stared at each other.

"Yes — I promise," at length Magdalen answered.

"Faithfully?" persisted Celia brightly.

"Faithfully."

Celia now kissed Magdalen quite differently. Before she had not felt sure of her. She had been afraid of her next action. She knew the strength of her will. And in its very strength lay the danger. Now she saw clearly that, however hopelessly any words of hers might have failed, the sight of the little gravestone had saved her. She was tolerably secure in her mind now.

Had she seen her near the lake when the bells pealed out she would not have had a doubt. No one has been closer to death than was the beautiful figure in white at that moment. No one has fled from it faster through the gift of an unconventional mind. Had she been cast in an ordinary mould the chances are that the sight of the broken column would have given a further impetus to her determination, and added the longing to lie by its side. It was otherwise with her.

Magdalen responded whole-heartedly to that confident kiss from Celia. She took the little, dark face in both her hands and scanned it closely. The set, hunted look, which a second ago filled the beautiful eyes, vanished. There was even a merry twinkle in them now.

"I wish I had that dear turn-up nose," she said with a funny sigh.

"You humbug, Magda," laughed out Celia.

"Oh, but it's a *heavenly* nose."

"It's nothing of the sort, you wretch," rejoined its owner, without in the least meaning it.

"Well, it's looking up there," Magdalen was quick to reply. The two might have continued chaffing each other indefinitely, had they not caught sight of the door opening exceedingly slowly. It was indicative of the approaching entrance of a gigantic packing-case, or possibly of an undertaker, so ponderous was the movement.

Finally their curiosity was satisfied by the return of Gur-

ney, to whom, judging from his face, which had added inches to its length since he left the room, some appalling catastrophe must have befallen in the space of five minutes.

Celia stared at him blankly, afraid at first to question him. And Magdalen remained silent, with her eyes fixed upon him.

Celia at length mustered up courage as she looked at her husband's dejected expression.

"What's — what's the matter, Marston?" she cried.

"I've done it," he answered gloomily. "I've telephoned for you."

"To the bookie? And you weren't in time? Oh-h!"

"I'm afraid I was," he said, in the same hopeless voice.

"Afraid?" was his wife's perplexed question.

"Yes, I don't feel so comfortable about it now."

Magdalen shook with laughter.

"Oh, but this is no laughing matter, Magda," said Celia, pursing up two rather pretty lips.

"Oh, yes — it — is — oh-h!" jerked out the other, almost beyond control. "I thought at least we'd gone to war with Germany. Oh — oh, Marston, forgive me, won't you? I — I know your feeling so well. I've never made a bet with a bookie yet that I haven't regretted it."

"I haven't had a go like this for ages, Lady Ware, and I've got out of my stride, you know," answered Gurney nervously.

"But have you very much on?" Celia asked anxiously.

"I'll tell you when it's over, dear, not before. Phew!"

Gurney went out into the garden, and sat under a Japanese umbrella, with a lemon squash in one hand and a fan in the other.

"You're all right, Celia," said Magdalen. "You made no mistake when you married Marston. He's intensely human."

"Rather a dear, isn't he?" rejoined Celia.

"*You* won't be tripped up. Your story at the end of four years won't be mine. I'd lay any money on that."

Celia gripped her hand.

"Thank God you'll never have for your husband the feeling I have for mine."

"I understand," whispered Celia gently.

"You do possibly. But the world wouldn't. Good heavens, no! It labels him the most generous fellow that ever stepped, who would give his last shilling to help a pal, and who never makes an ill-natured remark about anyone; a man who never *varies*, but is the same fascinating creature under all circumstances, with the gift of making the last person he meets feel that he is the most welcome at that particular moment — just the very one of all he wants to see, That is Hubert's character. And the world from Bond Street to Whitechapel would call me lucky woman. That's the word they'd use. Can't you hear them saying it? But the world's short-sighted if it's pleased, Celia. It doesn't see that a man who earns a reputation like that has to blow off the steam somewhere out of sight, and that his home is his safety-valve."

She had risen to her feet and gone to the window. The words were rapped out pointedly, incisively. She had almost forgotten her friend's presence in the room. She was speaking out her inmost thoughts. And yet while she uttered them it seemed to Celia that those she did not utter were sterner still.

Celia, however, in addition to her comeliness, possessed considerable tact. She remained silent, thinking that if Magdalen wished further to confide in her she would do so in her own way and at her own time. As she sat watching her standing motionless in the sunlight, with her eyes upon the distant hill, she thought that she looked more beautiful than she had ever looked before, and that assuredly she was the most lovely creature in the world. She pondered over the incongruity of it all. Carking care fitted those graceful shoulders badly.

But the peremptory sound of the telephone in the hall dragged both of them back from the kingdom of thoughts to the arena of reality.

"Shall I answer it, dear?" asked Celia anxiously.

"It can't be the Leger yet, Celia," said Magdalen with a

smile. "Rate will see to it. It's only a 'dun' probably," she added, with a shrug of the shoulders.

"Magda, forgive my asking, but as regards Sir Hubert, what are you going to do?"

"Stiffen my back, I suppose, and bear it."

"Ah, that's your real self, if you like," said Celia proudly.

"To join the common 'rut' and go in for divorce or separation doesn't appeal to me somehow. I detest publicity. And all that sort of thing smacks of advertisement and the limelight. It's rather lonesome to me. Honestly, I'd sooner die than stand up in a witness-box before a herd of blissless youths in wigs and gowns to tell a story like mine."

"Awful!" ejaculated her friend, in complete amazement.

"Oh, but I should like to put it all on a higher plane than that. Do you know, Celia, I was thinking just now of something your dear father once said. It was in the last sermon he preached—two years ago, just after I lost my baby." She swallowed with difficulty. "And I know he meant it for *me*," she continued with a smile. "His text was rather a fine one. I've never forgotten it. It was from Proverbs—'If thou faint in the day of adversity thy strength is small.' And he enlarged upon it in that adorable, sympathetic way he had. I can quote his words, I believe: 'To accept one's lot. To bear sorrow patiently without rebellion. And if given an excuse for yielding to temptation, not to seize it, but to resist it—er—'" She stopped in her effort to remember the rest.

"'Be the excuse ever so mighty,'" said Celia, helping her.

"That was it. 'Be the excuse ever so mighty.' I can see him now, the dear, good soul that he was, with his eyes quite moist, looking down at me over those great, round spectacles of his."

"He helped you then, didn't he, Magda? So let him help you now just as if he were here."

"Yes," replied Magdalen happily. "That's a much loftier plane to put it on, isn't it?"

Rate came into the room from the hall.

"Mr. Adye's clerk is on the telephone from London, my

lady," he announced, with his customary pained expression.

Magdalen's face became suddenly transformed. And Celia was quick to notice it. She looked in a flash quite radiant.

"Mr. Adye's clerk?" she asked almost incredulously.

"Yes, my lady," replied the butler. "He's speaking from Mr. Adye's chambers at the Temple, and asked for your ladyship. He says he's been trying to get our number for some time. I've held the line, my lady."

"Put him through to me here," said Magdalen eagerly.

Rate disappeared to do as he was told. And Magdalen, quite oblivious to Celia's company, uttered a suppressed cry of delight. As she paced the room now with a light step she was scarcely recognizable. And Celia could scarcely believe that it was the same tortured soul who had unburdened her heart to her but a minute ago. But it was not for Celia to remark the change. She contented herself with a commonplace observation.

"I suppose it was my bet that was engaging the line," was all she said.

Magdalen did not seem to hear her as she hastily took up the receiver.

"Yes — yes — it's Lady Ware speaking," she said quite composedly into the instrument. "Yes, I hear — you're Mr. Adye's clerk. Very well. I understand. Thank you. Good-bye."

She left the table and sat down close to Celia, who was concealing her thoughts in the luxury of the Adams sofa.

"A message from Mr. Adye?" asked Celia casually.

"Er — yes. He left town in his car about forty minutes ago. He's coming to see me."

"Quite a long time since he came, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is rather. But it's just like Mike to turn up when one needs a friend."

"What an extraordinary success he's been!"

"Yes, about the biggest practice at the Bar now."

"Fancy that! And he's only — how old is he exactly, Magda?"

"Mike? Thirty-seven."

"Marvellous, isn't it? And in politics too. I love his speeches."

"Yes, Attorney-General in the next Government for a certainty. And probably the future Lord Chancellor."

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Celia thoughtfully.

Magdalen looked at the clock upon the mantelpiece quickly.

"He ought to be here soon," she said very eagerly.

"Magda — Magda!" said Celia in a low, reproachful voice, as she held up a warning finger to her friend.

"Yes, *I* know," Magdalen rejoined playfully. "You — you think it might be dangerous for him to come just now."

"No, you duffer, not dangerous, because I know you'd never —"

"No, no, of course not," said Magdalen, whose tone of voice did not strike her little friend as being over strong. "Celia, I've told you a good deal. I'll tell you something more. When you were studying that year in Dresden, and I became engaged to Hubert, I could have married Michael if I had chosen."

"Oh-h!" exclaimed Celia with real regret.

"But the dear thing didn't speak," Magdalen continued. "And he never gave me the veriest inkling that he cared for me in that way. I'd simply looked upon him as a sort of wise elder brother, always ready to advise me about investments and all that kind of thing. I never had a suspicion of it till I found it out by accident a year afterwards — just at the moment, too, when the hideous blunder of my marriage was coming home to me."

"How did you find it out? Not from him, was it?" asked Celia fearfully.

"Of course not. He's never opened his lips to me. No, it was old Lady Blatchfield who was considerate enough to select that charming psychological moment," replied Magdalen sarcastically.

"Just the sort of thing she would do, with that painted face of hers," rapped out Celia.

"Yes, she didn't spare me," Magdalen continued bitterly.

"She piled it on. Said what a pity it was M.A., as she called him, didn't marry; that, with such a remarkable future before him, it was indecent of him not to. You know the way she talks."

"A regular old political schemer, that's all she is," interrupted Celia indignantly.

"I agreed with her, of course," proceeded Magdalen. "And then it was that she asked me why on earth I hadn't married him. And she went on to say that she knew for a fact that he was over head and ears in love with me; and not only that, but that, having let that chance slip, he never intended to marry as long as he lived. Celia, I've been miserable ever since."

"The old reptile!" muttered the girl.

"And yet I've been happy too."

Celia clutched her arm firmly.

"Yes, I have," repeated Magdalen vehemently. "And I'm glad he's coming. I admit it; I admit it!"

Men's voices approaching from the garden were audible.

"Come in, Egerton, and see my wife," said Ware gaily upon the terrace.

"Ssh!" whispered Magdalen to Celia, "they've finished their game."

CHAPTER IV

“**H**OW do you do, Sir Henry?” said Magdalen cheerfully, as she extended her hand to Egerton. “Had a good game?”

“Capital, Lady Ware.”

“The best, dear,” added Ware charmingly.

“Yes, but your husband’s nearly killed me,” said Egerton, wiping his face. “I’m really not presentable. Two long sets when you’re nearing fifty, and the thermometer 82 in the shade.”

Ware laughed heartily.

“But he scorned a four when I recommended it,” he said to Magdalen.

“Quite right,” said Egerton. “It was only my chaff. It’s exercise I need, Lady Ware. With my work I can’t get on without it.”

“Well, let’s sit outside and cool down, eh?” remarked Ware. “There are drinks on the terrace. Come on, Magda.”

They all went out as suggested, and enjoyed what air there was under the protection of a vast awning of brilliant colours, such as may be seen at the villas on the Lake of Como.

With the assistance of two footmen Rate had placed upon a table there the choicest cigars, the most expensive cigarettes, the best lemons, the purest aerated waters, and the inevitable whisky. He had directed an arrangement of the most luxurious garden chairs and *chaises longues* imaginable with a Japanese fan placed handily upon each; and altogether it formed the coolest and shadiest nook procurable in the circumstances.

In every sense it was conducive to peaceful thought and enjoyment. Magdalen reclined gracefully upon a *chaise*

longue with a mind outwardly as clear as crystal; Celia, after bunching up the cushions for her, joined her husband under the Japanese umbrella in the rose-garden to discuss further the chances of "Aeroplane"; Egerton leaned back in his comfortable chair with a sigh of complete contentment; and Ware, having offered a lemon-squash to Magdalen, which she declined, and one to Egerton, which he accepted, mixed himself a moderately strong whisky and soda.

Deservedly he had earned the reputation of a model host, and Magdalen's description of him to Celia just now was a very fair one. Ware was popular wherever he went. Apart from his social standing, his charm of manner was his passport to a remarkable degree, and his exceedingly handsome face and elegant figure made him the reverse of harmless with the ladies. He had but to choose; and if he did, there were precious few of what nowadays must be called the "stronger sex" who resisted him. And how they all envied Lady Ware!

With men it was the same story. "Hubby" Ware, as he was called, was hail-fellow-well-met everywhere. He was prodigal in his generosity, rarely failed to help his friends, never failed to pay his bets, kept the best cook in London, shot well, rode well, and was a first-class card player. What more do you want to make you popular? Do not these qualifications alone create you a *persona grata*? If, too, in passing, you are also the proud possessor of some title, and perchance have about you an air of refinement, innate or acquired, there is not a door that you cannot fling wide open. You have the key in your pocket.

Sir Hubert Ware was in that "fortunate position." To begin with, he was a baronet—the second one. His father, Sir Joseph, was the first. Cotton and that well-worn stepping-stone called "philanthropy" had secured it for him after repeated efforts personal and vicarious, large expense and considerable "blowing of his own trumpet." But he was a decent fellow, they said, although he was a vulgar devil, and his use of the knife and fork was distinctly Teutonic.

Hubert was his only child, and Sir Joseph and her ladyship had ideas concerning him. At least Sir Joseph had. It always was doubtful if her ladyship until the day of her death had any ideas. According to her contemporaries beauty was her one and only recommendation. No doubt, then, she was solely responsible for the exceptionally good looks of her son. Unquestionably Sir Joseph had no share in them. Well, shortly before his wife's death, which occurred when Hubert was twelve, Sir Joseph propounded his plans for the boy's future. He was born, he said, with a golden spoon in his mouth, and must live up to it. There were to be none of the struggles of youth such as the father had had to endure. His path must be rolled very smooth. "The best public school and the University for *my* son!" he said. "No expense spared!" And he set to work enthusiastically to map out for the boy a luxurious and self-indulgent existence. He encouraged it and thought it gentlemanly. Hubert, with plenty of money, was able to do what other boys did, and from the earliest age "went the pace." But the father was pleased. His vanity was tickled. Was not Lord T. Hubert's most intimate schoolfellow? Did not Hubert spend part of his holidays at Lord T.'s father's country seat—the Marquess of A.? And had not Lord T. the same tastes? The youngster was always in debt, but he had had it so impressed upon him that his father was his best friend, and that, when in a mess, he must go to him immediately, that he acquired that not unknown habit of never thinking for himself, but only of himself. It was not his fault. It was, you will think, about the most foolish, if not culpable, bringing-up of a boy conceivable; and actually by a father reputed all his life as a hard-headed business man! But ye gods! vanity is a malignant growth, and with Sir Joseph its microbes bred at a prodigious pace. They gobbled up every business instinct, and gnawed away all common sense.

The shield had, of course, its other side. Hubert made hosts of friends, and, through the inestimable advantage of a refined association, acquired that something which is so difficult to describe, but which, coupled with a prepossessing

appearance, carries you very far upon the road to prosperity or damnation. In due course he went up to the University well equipped for a joyous time. His father received his baronetcy, and Hubert was his heir. His college days gave him "the time of his life." He had the *entrée* to every club he chose to join; he was the best-dressed man of his year; if he did very little reading he did a great deal of racing; he entertained *en prince*; and he paid for nothing. Three years of this existence had galloped by when one night in his rooms, while presiding at his roulette table, the telephone informed him of Sir Joseph's sudden death. He had expired apparently at the dinner table, having eaten, it was hinted, too Teutonically. Young Sir Hubert inherited his entire fortune minus a large sum of money which the old man, from no altruistic motive, directed to be applied towards the building and endowment of a ward at St. Sebastian's Hospital "upon the strict condition that it be known perpetually as the 'Sir Joseph Ware Ward,' and that these words be repainted annually in legible type both outside and inside its entrance."

This made a hole in the invested capital, but the new baronet was nevertheless a rich man, and in the opinion of the world a decidedly eligible husband.

However, 97 Bruton Street and Wilbury for the remaining eight years of his bachelorhood were occupied by him spasmodically. By force of habit he had cultivated a restless existence. No race meeting was complete without Hubby Ware. He was deservedly popular with all the book-makers, for, like most mortals, he lost on the whole, and he always paid. He was a marked figure at the Savoy, the Carlton, and the Ritz, where he was an ideal customer upon a large scale; the best restaurants in Paris and Vienna knew him almost as well; and he frequently took his Rolls-Royce across the Channel for a Continental motor-tour at an excessive speed in more senses than one, regularly halting at Monte Carlo and Aix at the correct seasons of the year.

But these little amusements have an ugly knack of costing more than a little money. Accordingly there arrived a time when, to settle his debts, Ware commenced the practice,

which later became an annual one, of diving into his capital.

His solicitor, who knew him well enough to be candid and was an expert in conventional advice, begged him to "draw in," and urged him to "settle down." Ware, at the age of thirty-one, agreed with him. And out of a large circle of acquaintances he threw his eye upon the beautiful Magdalen Ede, and asked her to be his wife. She was barely twenty-one at the time, and we know from her own lips how she came to accept him, and how they had now been married four years. We have it also from her that her opinion of her husband differed from that of the world. Which of these two divergent views was correct remains to be seen. In any event the Ware case was not an unknown one.

One fact, however, was manifest. A crash in that house was imminent. It was approaching with overwhelming force, surely and swiftly. After a cursory glimpse into Ware's career and upbringing it was inevitable. Lack of discipline and self-indulgence had been his enemies. And they were his deadliest enemies of all. Having declared war upon him, they waged it remorselessly with the most formidable strategy, the most invincible tactics. And the indemnity they exacted was crushing.

Here in the case of these two people all comfort and luxury enjoyed for so long would be forced to give place to comparative poverty. Magdalen recognized this fully as we know, and, with many more thoughts than she gave utterance to, was racking her brains as to the way to meet it. She had conquered the feeling of despair, and her one absorbing wish, so characteristic of her sex, was to rise to the emergency courageously and practically. But the wish is one thing; the method is another. And remembering that the full realization of their ruin had been brought home to her by her husband but one short hour ago, it is not surprising that for the moment she was unable to find the path which might extricate herself and Ware from a maze of difficulty.

In her stormy interview with him in the library, to which she had alluded to Celia, their financial position in the main was made clear to her. Ware's capital was exhausted.

Wilbury and 97 Bruton Street were heavily mortgaged. Ware could no longer meet the interest, nor any of the manifold obligations surrounding him. Nothing, in fact, remained to them except Magdalen's own money, amounting to ten thousand pounds settled upon her by her father when she married, and a like sum settled upon her at the same time by her husband. This, apart from some Great Western shares in Magdalen's name, was all that was safe. Upon an income, therefore, of less than a thousand a year, these two, to whom nothing had been denied, would have to exist.

But that thought alone did not fill her cup of suffering.

To a woman of her temperament, with a genuine horror of publicity, the contemplation of bankruptcy and the disgrace attached to it was appalling. Had it been due to misfortune, or bad judgment, she could have faced it nobly, painful as it might be. She would have stood loyally by any man who had treated her honourably. Is there a single good woman in the world who would not?

But here the tale was wholly different. A fortune had been flung away wantonly. It had been squandered upon other women who could laugh at her, women who would laugh at her as surely as the night precedes the day. And for all she knew the whole story with its edifying ramifications might be revealed at his Examination. Probably it would be, she thought. There was no knowing how far it might not lead, what wretchedly sordid details might not be dragged out. She conjured up visions of the newspapers with their flaming headlines distributing broadcast the miserable history, and giving it piquancy by the reproduction of photographs of the husband and wife who had been married only four years. And to her proud nature the very notion of the pity she would receive was a torture. She felt insulted, degraded, humiliated — she of all women on the earth! Is it surprising that she had tried to die?

But Egerton, looking at the husband and wife at that moment, outwardly happy and composed in their charming surroundings, had no suspicion of an impending storm, nor of the lack of sympathy between them. Being, perhaps, of a satirical turn of mind, you will accept that as natural from

the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department at Scotland Yard. But you would, indeed, be doing Egerton an injustice. Sir Hubert and Lady Ware were such an exemplary host and hostess that not only detectives, but anyone, would have been deceived.

"Ah, I feel better," said Egerton, putting down his glass. "But I wish I hadn't to go to Scotland Yard to-night."

"Must you?" asked Ware. "Can't you stop and dine?"

"Afraid not."

"Anything exciting on?"

"Well, it's a complicated case."

"Murder?" asked Ware, with the keenest interest.

"Well, yes, it is a murder."

"A good one, eh?"

"Now, what does he mean by a good one?" inquired Egerton laughingly of Magdalen, who shook her head with a smile.

"Well, a real thriller," answered Ware readily. "A mystery which the halfpenny press describes as deepening every day; something to devour before you get up in the morning; something —"

"That draws the entire theatrical profession to the Old Bailey?" queried Egerton.

"That's it!" Ware exclaimed with enthusiasm.

"And testifies to the growing Continental propensities of the London mob," added Magdalen.

"Well, this might, Lady Ware," continued Egerton, "if it ever got as far as the Old Bailey. It's the Soho murder."

"A splendid one!" said Ware.

"Ha! But a teaser," was the reply.

"But you know, Egerton, all your good murder cases are teasers now," Ware argued. "They are always remaining undiscovered crimes. It's getting deadly monotonous. The truth of the matter is that all these murderers are too cunning for you."

"And you are too good and too straight for them, Sir Henry," said Magdalen charmingly.

Egerton leaned forward in his chair and bowed to her gallantly.

"That's just it, dear," interrupted Ware, while he regarded Egerton with a twinkle. "My dear fellow, you're becoming a public scandal. No, but, joking apart, all those chaps under you at Scotland Yard want shaking up. They're behind the times. The moment they join the detective force they ought to be inoculated."

"Inoculated?" said Egerton perplexedly.

"Yes, with some new sort of serum of craftiness, patented by—"

"Yourself, eh, Ware? Now, there's a chance for you if you like," was Egerton's jocular reply. "But seriously, though, a murder is often a good deal more intricate than the public imagines. Even when you catch your bird, to get a conviction from a jury the evidence must be pretty conclusive. One weak bar in the cage and away he flies."

"Until he's caught again," said Magdalen.

"Oh, on some new charge altogether, you mean?" Egerton queried casually.

"No, not a new charge, Sir Henry. I meant the same charge. Suppose you found some fresh evidence?"

"It would be worthless, my dear lady. We simply couldn't touch him. He never could be tried again on the same charge, you see."

"But why not?"

"Because it's the law."

"You mean to say that is the law?" And Magdalen's finely pencilled eyebrows formed two perfect triumphal arches.

"I do indeed," was the quiet but emphatic answer.

Magdalen looked somewhat disgusted, and could have waxed eloquent had she chosen. But she did not choose.

"Then Sam Weller was right," was all she said.

"Absolutely," replied Egerton in complete agreement with her. "But there it is. A man could be tried and acquitted of any criminal charge you like, and five minutes afterwards, if he chose, he could go off to Trafalgar Square and publicly proclaim his guilt. And neither the Director of Public Prosecutions nor myself with my entire force, freshly inoculated with your serum, Ware, could touch him. As far as that

charge is concerned, of which a jury has once acquitted him, he's scot free for ever."

"Perfectly colossal!" exclaimed Ware.

This exposition of the criminal law greatly interested Magdalen. It took her completely out of herself, and she cordially endorsed her husband's remark. It was natural, too, that a discussion of this nature should lead further, and that an apparent anomaly to the lay mind should involve argument. Magdalen had an active brain, and liked to understand things. The why and the wherefore appealed to her. And this dictum just propounded by Egerton, who knew what he was talking about, was a revelation to her, as it may be to not a few others. She tackled him, therefore, upon the creation of the Court of Criminal Appeal. What was the meaning of its existence? What did it sit for?

Egerton explained generally that it was for the benefit of convicted prisoners who could, with leave, appeal to it against an adverse verdict given at their trial. He showed Magdalen that on appeal a sentence, though often reduced, was occasionally increased, or a conviction quashed; that usually three judges sat in the Court of Criminal Appeal; and that at times, owing to some trifling technical oversight at his trial, the most flagrant ruffian unhung could appeal successfully and escape the gallows, the Court of Criminal Appeal up to the time "for going to Press" not having, forsooth, the power possessed by the Court of Appeal in civil cases to order a new trial.

Magdalen was quick enough to grasp this last point, and to apply it logically to the commencement of the discussion. She faced Egerton very intelligently, and said that, according to him, the man who had been convicted at his trial, but who on appeal had his conviction quashed on the ground of some trumpery technicality, could there and then with impunity tell the whole Bench that he was guilty, and leave the court a free man!

"You have it, Lady Ware," he said. "There's no getting away from that."

"Then let me understand," she proceeded, "because this is extraordinarily interesting."

"Why, Magda, you're getting as keen on criminal matters as I am. Splendid!" interrupted Ware, in high spirits.

She kept her mind to the point, and did not seem to hear her husband.

"It comes to this, doesn't it, Sir Henry?" she continued; "a man can appeal against a conviction, but — oh, dear! I don't know how to put it."

"The Crown never in any circumstances can appeal against a verdict of not guilty," explained Egerton. "A man once acquitted of a criminal charge never can be retried upon it, no matter how guilty he is."

"Well, I agree with my wife," said Ware. "I think the law is idiotic. You ought to agitate to get it altered."

Magdalen then noticed the suspicion of a yawn hovering round the corners of Egerton's mouth. And while personally she felt grateful to a new topic, which had enabled her to forget other matters, she feared that he was scarcely interested to the same degree in what to him was a hackneyed subject.

"What a shame of me, Sir Henry, to make you talk shop!" she said.

"At any rate, it's the most fascinating shop there is," protested Ware.

"Crime?" said Egerton. "To you, I know, you morbid wretch!"

"Yes, I've a pile of books on crime in my library — English and French," Ware continued, as he proceeded to enumerate them: "'Celebrated Trials,' six volumes; 'La Criminalité Comparée'; 'La Criminologie'; and a lot more. They're the chief relaxation in my strenuous life."

It was a quaint hobby, you may think, for a man of Ware's tastes. But incontestably he was by no means exceptional. Not in the least. He was, indeed, only one out of that large number of well-groomed people of both sexes who, having successfully pestered the Under-Sheriff for tickets, will actually breakfast at half-past eight or nine, and for days on end will sit glued to the seats of the Old Bailey to hear a murder trial. I verily believe that the ladies, if they could, would pay an annual rent for a "sitting" there as well as at St.

Peter's, Eaton Square, and that their attendance would be more regular. What does the poor devil on trial for his life think of them?

"Well, it's a weird taste of yours, Ware," said Egerton laughingly.

"By the way, I was reading a fascinating murder last night. A French one," said Ware, with considerable relish.

"Oh, lord!" exclaimed Egerton, covering his face with his hands.

"Ah, but they do them so picturesquely over there somehow. This was as far back as '86, but it was quite new to me."

"Nonsense!" And Egerton smiled at Magdalen.

"Yes, really," Ware continued. "So I entered it in my book-diary."

"Your what?"

"My book-diary. I enter every good crime in it on the date I first read it."

"Well, you're a marvel."

And so the conversation had drifted on. Everything must have a beginning. And the beginning here was tennis!

CHAPTER V

“**H**AVE a weed, Egerton?” said Ware, opening a box, after a good laugh. “I think you liked those the other day.”

“Thanks, I can’t refuse them,” was Egerton’s reply, while he struck a match. “They’re wonderful.”

Magdalen, recognizing that if men once get on to the subject of cigars or wine the sitting is likely to be a long one, rose from her *chaise longue*. It certainly was not a topic to interest her deeply in her existing frame of mind. On the contrary, it was calculated to bring her back completely to herself and to the present. And it did so with a jerk. She thought she heard a motor-horn not far away, and rushed instantly to the conclusion that it must be Michael Adye’s. She hoped devoutly that it might be, for the truth was that, though she had not said so in words to Celia, she longed to see him. She left her husband and Egerton to enjoy their cigars, and from a point upon the terrace a few yards away, with a heart thumping in her throat, stood watching a patch of the main road just visible through a gap in the trees. It was there that the man who loved her would pass. It was there that she cherished the youthful hope of catching an early glimpse of the man who could have made her happy. And anyone watching her would have detected the look of disappointment which crossed her face when, looking for a green car, she descried a red one.

It was not his motor-horn yet. But he was on his way. Fate was ordaining the meeting of these two. It was decreeing the bringing together of a man and a woman at a perilous moment in their lives. When Michael Adye, K.C., M.P., jumped into his six-cylinder Napier in King’s Bench Walk, there was in his step and every movement the elasticity of a boy. And it was difficult with his youthful mien to

realize the remarkable position he had attained both at the Bar and in the House of Commons. But he was one of those brilliant creatures whom nothing in any career that he might have chosen could hold back. He was altogether exceptional, and Magdalen had not exaggerated in telling Celia that he was sure of the Attorney-Generalship in the next Government and of the Woolsack in his maturer years. He was an eloquent platform speaker, with terse, direct, simple sentences which he never blurred with qualifications; a master with a jury, and equally admirable in the Court of Appeal; and he combined with these what does not always follow — a perfect "House of Commons manner." When he "was up" the benches filled rapidly, and in the Mother of Parliaments he was one of the mighty few worth listening to. Six feet tall and as thin as a lath, you took it for granted that he established the three-mile record for his University at Queen's Club. And when you looked into his deep-sunk, piercing brown eyes you invariably felt thankful that he was not to cross-examine you. Altogether his appearance, devoid of eccentricity or affectation, was a very striking one. He had one of those long thin faces over which the skin seems to be drawn very tightly; a well-chiselled nose upon the aquiline side; firmly set full lips which could turn up humorously at the corners; and a powerful chin, which meant business when the slightly underhung jaw asserted itself. He appealed forcibly to women, who often prefer an attractive ugliness to the beauty of an Adonis. He was, too, as well known by sight as any man in London. A remark which greeted him as he turned into the Strand was evidence of that.

"There's 'M. A.,'" said one young fellow to another.

He laughed to himself for more reasons than one. Whereas formerly the nickname was somewhat distinctive, it had now, he considered, ceased to be so altogether. It was not only applicable to the degree of Master of Arts, but to Music Hall Artists as well. He was young, too, in heart as well as in looks. On that afternoon he was supremely happy to have a reason, painful as that reason might be, to take him to Wilbury after a fairly long absence to see the one woman who in all his life had really influenced him. He wished to be-

friend her if he could. He yearned to be near her in her hour of need. He would do anything to help her in any way she asked. He loved her silently. She was the wife of another man. And he cursed his luck.

He reckoned that in forty minutes he would be by her side, but there appeared to be a conspiracy against him. At Piccadilly Circus and in Regent Street he found that the authorities had become enlightened and were actually relaying the wood-pavement in the autumn instead of in the height of the season. This necessitated a *détour*. Later, in the neighbourhood of Willesden, an overheated engine, which of course had never become overheated before, caused a further delay. In the circumstances he did not accept these small hindrances philosophically. On the contrary, like many another clever person, whether in Parliament or not, his language was decidedly unparliamentary. And when finally at Harrow a tyre burst, the report of the explosion was only to be equalled by the maledictions of its owner, whom in this respect a gift of the gab, when occasion demanded it, certainly did not desert.

Magdalen saw many cars pass during her vigil, but never the right one. It was the old story of the "watched pot." And, realizing this, she rejoined Egerton and her husband simultaneously with Gurney and Celia, who came up the steps to the terrace from the west side of the garden.

"Hallo, Marston!" said Ware. "I wondered what had become of you."

"I went down to the lake and bathed," Gurney answered nervously.

"No news of the race yet," remarked Egerton slyly to him.

"No. Phew! that's why I bathed."

"You're just fairly on the wrong 'un, Marston," was Ware's consoling observation. "You're going to get it in the neck. In half an hour's time we shall hear 'Blacksocks' has won."

"Oh, well, Sir Hubert, that's all right," replied Gurney, with a distinctly forced gaiety.

"I'm sorry, old fellow, but you're going to lose your money."

Celia uttered a cry of alarm, and Gurney proceeded to bite his nails.

"Well, I don't think so," said Egerton sympathetically.

"Oh, thank you, Sir Henry," exclaimed the girl. "You know I've backed 'Aeroplane' too on your advice."

Egerton laughed and took her hand.

"Let us go and knock the croquet balls about, Mrs. Gurney," he said. "We'll make this half hour pass somehow, eh?"

"It will never pass," was Celia's doleful answer, as she walked off with Egerton to the east lawn.

"Did Eustace bathe with you, Marston?" asked Magdalen.

"No, Lady Ware. I tried to persuade him to. But he's rather 'off' with us, I'm afraid. He said if he bathed he'd bathe alone. So I left him up in his room."

"Poor old Eustace!" said Ware somewhat sorrowfully.

"Yes," agreed Magdalen, "we were rather hard on him just now, I think, Marston." And she walked away a few yards along the terrace. Gurney watched her for a few moments, and thought that the opportunity was presenting itself for him to tell Ware of the telephone message.

"Could you come indoors a moment, Sir Hubert?" he whispered to him.

"Yes, of course."

They went into the library, and Gurney, like many people who have unpleasant news to tell, took some time to come to the point. He did not know how to begin, and, taking up an addressed letter from the writing-table, began to talk irrelevantly:

"Er — Sir Hubert, would you lend me your signet ring? These new envelopes are so miserably gummed that —"

He broke off in his effort to make the envelope stick.

"There you are," said Ware, from the sofa, as he handed him the ring. Gurney took it and sealed the envelope.

"It's your letter to the German family in Hanover about Eustace."

"Oh, yes," replied Ware. "I want that to catch to-night's mail."

"You and Lady Ware are awfully good to him."

"Well, damn it, Marston, he's my wife's brother," said Ware amusedly. "And a word in the boy's favour when he's going to a family there doesn't take much out of you, does it?"

Gurney returned the ring to him.

"It's an awful pity he never went to a public school or the 'Varsity," he continued. "And it's worse than a pity that he's coming into all this money without any qualifications for managing it."

"His is not an exceptional case, my dear Marston."

Gurney considered all this an admirable introduction to the bad news he had to tell. And he became almost dogmatic in his tone.

"Still," he went on, "it's a bit rough that a good sort like Lady Ware shouldn't have it instead of her being dependent on Eustace's death. Rotten, I call it!"

Ware looked round at Gurney with an expression which, to put it mildly, was one of surprise. He even let his cigar go out.

"I say, Marston," he said, "I never credited you before with a mercenary mind. 'Aeroplane's' unhinging you, I think."

"I'm awfully sorry, Sir Hubert, but I can't help it. It's a blasted shame, that will! And it's the present circumstances that make the whole injustice of the thing so damned plain."

"Well, old chap, you may be emphatic, but you are sympathetic; and that's something."

The young fellow paused for a moment and looked with admiration at Ware, who lighted a cigarette with the calmness of a big financier who has to face a crisis, and offered his case to him with that charming smile of his which captivated everybody.

"No, thanks very much, Sir Hubert," he said, then hesitating before blurting out his news. "Er — Sir Hubert, Ingleworths have rung up to say you must settle their account by Thursday or action will be taken."

Gurney looked away, and kicked the carpet uneasily. Ware exhibited no surprise. There was silence for some seconds. Nothing could be heard but the droning of a bee which had flown into the room quite easily, and was now experiencing difficulty in finding the window.

"Oh, have they?" remarked Ware at length, with a shrug of his shoulders. "Well, one more or less — what does it matter?"

"By Jove! You're splendid the way you take it!"

"My dear fella, what other way is there? Once in the tumbrel, you've got to face the music, eh?"

"But I'm awfully sorry," said Gurney warmly, as he grasped the other's hand. "I wish to God *I* had money, that's all."

"H'm! I wish you had, old chap," answered Ware with a laugh.

Rate interrupted them. He brought a visiting card to Ware.

"There's a man in the hall, Sir Hubert, and I can't get rid of him. I told 'im you was out, Sir Hubert, but he said he'd seen you from the drive, and knew you'd see him, Sir Hubert."

Ware looked at the card, while Gurney gave Ware's letter to Rate with instructions to post it at once.

"Tommy Bold!" exclaimed Ware. "Why, of course I'll see him. Show him in at once."

"It's a very seedy bit, Sir Hubert." And Rate wore quite an agonized look.

"All the more reason for me to see him. Go on. Hurry, Rate, hurry!"

Rate obeyed his order and disappeared.

"Tommy Bold!" repeated Ware with amused astonishment as he fingered the card. "Well, I'm —"

"Who is he?" inquired Gurney.

"There's only one Tommy Bold. Used to be a devilish prosperous bookie. Great Scot! He's had his fair whack out of me in his time. Ho! ho!"

"Mister Bold," was Rate's sepulchral announcement from the door. And following him, there appeared the wreck of

an elderly man in the room, whom Ware regarded searchingly in his endeavour to find a trace of the prosperous book-maker whom he had known almost intimately up to five years before. All that he saw now was a thin, pale face sadly in need of a razor, a pair of watery eyes which blinked inordinately, a bald head with its scanty supply of hair grown whiter, bent shoulders, a very thin body upon which a very shabby grey suit literally hung, and that unmistakable wasting look in the back of the neck, which makes the collar appear always to be three sizes too large for it. His only characteristic left was his black and white bird's-eye scarf, and that now struggled to hold itself together without a pin.

Ware jumped up from his chair, and held out his hand to him with extraordinary charm and sympathy. It did Gurney's heart good to see it. Here were two men who had fallen on evil days.

Ware knew that, though Tommy Bold, standing in that beautiful room, and regarding Ware's customary, immaculate appearance, not unnaturally considered himself the only one.

"Well, Tommy, how are you?" asked Ware gently.

"Done, sir, smashed," was the scarcely audible answer.

"Ah-h!" And Ware pressed his hand strongly.

Gurney was not given that way, but the picture went home to him. He had to turn his back and look out of the window for some time.

"Yes, I don't know what to do, sir. I was out in Hyde Park all last night and the night before. Lucky it's hot and fine. And this morning I didn't know where to turn. So I pulled myself together at — what ought to have been breakfast time — and started to walk down here to see you."

"To *walk*, Tommy?" asked Ware, biting his lips.

"Yes, sir. I remembered how well you'd always treated me in my prosperous days —"

"Always paid my losses, you mean?"

"Yes, sir. But I always paid you mine, didn't I?"

"I think you only lost once to me Tommy, eh?"

"Quite right, sir. Middle Park Plate. That's it. Well, sir, I believed you'd treat me well again when I'm down in my luck. Oh, I know it's all my own fault. I didn't run

straight on one occasion. I know that. But, my God, I've paid for it, sir! And — and I don't believe you'd kick me out of the house."

The wretched man shook from head to foot. He had not the strength to control himself, and he presented a spectacle which it is hard to match — a man of years crying like a child.

Ware helped him into a chair, and after a time he was able to speak.

"Try to remember what I was like, sir, at Newmarket, Epsom, Doncaster — Doncaster! That's where I ought to be to-day, sir. But what's a man to do when he's desperate?" he asked violently.

Ware in his own grievous plight felt the force of the remark.

"He's got to do something. That's very certain. He's driven to it, I say. I've been in gaol once, and that finished me. There's no chance for me, sir. I can't get up out of it. I *can't*. I'm done!"

Ware without a sixpence in the world looked hard at his fellow-sufferer.

"How can I help you, Tommy?" he asked gently.

"Any way you like, sir. Only a trifle. I don't ask for any more. I want a meal to stop — to stop the pain. I haven't the pluck to end it. I wish to God I had! Why doesn't He give us the pluck to end it? Why doesn't He? That's what I should like to know!"

Upon these last words he rose to his feet with his clenched fist uplifted and his eyes aflame.

Ware thought for a moment, and took his cheque-book from a drawer in the writing-table. Then, remembering that a cheque ran the risk of being dishonoured, and that in that event Tommy Bold would hardly gain by the transaction, he put away the cheque-book again. He never had felt so powerless. How could he help this man to any appreciable extent? He considered that the gift of half a sovereign in a case like this would be childish. Besides, he reflected, it is the little bit extra which gives pleasure in life — the surprise. With a sudden thought he opened his pocket-book, and an

expression of real pleasure crossed his face as he extracted a five-pound note. It was the only note in the book, and if it had been larger he would not have hesitated.

"Here you are, Tommy," he said, as he handed him the money and turned away. "Good luck to you!"

"You give me that, sir! You give me that! Thank you, sir, thank you," gasped out the other. "I may have changed, but, my God! you haven't. I shall never forget this—*never*."

The note crackled consolingly in the man's trembling fingers, and he stood blinking at it in amazement.

His benefactor rang the bell, and Rate reappeared.

"Rate, give my friend a good luncheon, with a pint of that champagne I had last night," said Ware, who then turned cheerfully to the bookmaker. "Go with him, Tommy. He'll fix you up. Afterwards you can take a stroll in the grounds before going back to town. Good-bye."

The bent figure shuffled across to Ware, and clung silently to his outstretched hand. He looked round furtively, and, observing Rate standing in the doorway, lowered his voice to a whisper as with a great effort he raised his eyes to Ware's handsome face.

"You know what I'd like—to say, don't you, sir?" he said, half choking. "But—but I can't get it out."

"Oh, never mind that, Tommy," answered Ware brightly.

"I shall be able to do it, though, behind your back, sir. I shall tell some of those damned Socialists how good the rich are to the poor. I'll have a tub of my own in Hyde Park, and paint it Royal blue."

Ware laughed and shook the wasted hand finally.

Two ruined men looked into each other's eyes.

In another instant this one member of the crowd of wasters was leaving the room with a much more sprightly step than when he entered it. But he stopped suddenly by the door and turned round briskly.

"Got anything on 'Aeroplane' to-day, Sir Hubert?" he inquired slyly.

"No. Do you think he's likely to win, Tommy?"

The old man apparently thought that words would not

sufficiently convey his convictions. He merely screwed up his keen-featured face, and shut one eye for a considerable length of time. Then he was gone.

"Sir Hubert, you're a brick, if ever there was one," exclaimed Gurney enthusiastically from the window.

"Hallo, Marston," answered Ware with a start. "I forgot you were there." He reclined upon the Adams sofa, and Gurney came to his side.

"I want you to do me a favour, Sir Hubert."

"Anything in the world, Marston. Fire away, old chap."

"You'll have to go through an awful time. And, of course, you can't keep me as your secretary. I want to know if you'll let me stick on as a friend to do anything I can for you."

There was a pause while Ware looked up at him gratefully.

"Thanks, old boy. Done with you," he said.

"But I think things in some way or other will turn," added Gurney hopefully. "They can say what they like, but I don't believe an action like yours just now can go unrewarded."

"Ho! ho!" laughed Ware bitterly. "Cast your bread upon the waters — Ha! ha! I *don't* think."

CHAPTER VI

AFTER this use of the jargon of the day, of which he was a master, Ware, now left alone by Gurney, continued to recline leisurely upon the sofa in a cloud of cigarette smoke. He was in the act of examining the ceiling, where, whether in a difficulty at Bridge or in a difficulty in life, one often for some inscrutable reason expects to find a solution. This particular ceiling certainly failed to give him the slightest assistance. And search for it as he might he found himself repeating, *ad nauseam*, a phrase of Tommy Bold's: "What's a man to do when he's desperate?"

He was quite lost in thought, and paid no attention to his wife, who came into the room from the terrace, and sat down by the writing-table. She had grown weary of her vigil outside, and her beautiful face, now free from the gaze of strangers, was drawn and harassed-looking. She looked at her husband, who remained as before, apparently oblivious to her presence.

"Hubert," she said quietly. But he did not stir.

"Hubert!" She raised her voice the second time.

"Ye-e-e-s?" was Ware's answer, in a tone of utter callousness.

"What do you propose doing?" asked Magdalen steadily.

"Ha! I really haven't the ghost of a notion."

His attitude maddened her. Was she not concerned? Could no thought whatsoever be extended to her?

"Oh, the tone you—" And she broke off angrily.

"I really don't see how my tone can alter the situation."

"Which means—ruin."

"Blue ruin," he replied frivolously.

"With no possible way out?"

"Oh, yes, one."

"What's that?"

"The Court. Ha! ha!"

"Oh, stop, stop!" she cried madly. "I may be an absolute child — a fool in money matters —"

"I won't argue that point with you," he replied icily.

"But I understand clearly enough the disgrace which that will — Oh-h!"

She rose distractedly from her chair, and paced the room.

"What is it now?" asked Ware wearily.

Magdalen became rigid, and dug her nails into the palms of her hands. She could not control her words. She did not want to. She was beyond herself.

"Thank God little Philip died!" she exclaimed wildly.

"Oh, that's you all over, Magdalen," was Ware's cold response. "You will hark back so. Why introduce extraneous matters?"

"Extraneous! Extraneous!"

"If only women would keep to the point!" he continued calmly.

"What are you made of, I wonder? You're cruel."

"Rage on! Rage on!" And Ware rose calmly from the sofa to take down a volume from the bookcase close by.

"If the world could see you now!" replied Magdalen.

"It would be edified, no doubt," was his quiet answer as he lay upon the sofa, "by the rare sight of a man reading in his own domestic circle, my dear."

He tapped the volume with a marital smile, and glanced at her with a marital look.

"My French murder I was telling Egerton about. Now, let me see; the turned-down page marks the spot I left off at."

Magdalen was being goaded too far. Claspings her hands together she tried, but failed to form some words. They remained but a stifled exclamation as she came close to his side.

"Ah, now, have a little consideration," Ware went on in the same frigid tone. "I'm at a most absorbing passage."

"Put that book down!" commanded Magdalen.

Ware sprang up and seized her almost savagely by the wrist. The movement was so quick that she was unprepared for it. He tightened his grip upon her, and twisted her skin in the process. A horrible trick, acquired very probably at

school, and, as the Divorce Court will tell us, perfected in wedlock.

With a struggle Magdalen freed herself from him.

"You — you hurt me!" she cried out, rubbing her wrist.

"I — I'm sorry, Magdalen. I didn't mean to. I — forgive me?"

She failed to answer him.

"But if I'm to be subjected to constant interruption," he continued frigidly, "I'd better place the book back on the shelf."

"I agree with you, Hubert."

Ware returned to the bookcase, and left the volume where he had originally taken it from.

"H'm! That suit you?"

"I believe it affords you a fiendish delight to see me lose my self-control," observed Magdalen sorrowfully as she sank into a chair.

Ware seated himself on the sofa, and looked across at her.

"My dear Magda, it's an entertainment you've frequently treated me to for the last — let me see —"

"Three years," she answered quietly.

"That's a longish run."

"But you know the cause, Hubert. And even you, I fancy, might be sufficiently fair to think it's a strong enough one. However, it's the last time you will see me rebel or care."

Ware regarded her quietly with a suspicion of alarm on his face.

"What do you mean?" he asked, and he came to her side.

"Oh, going to leave me, eh? Going to clear out when I'm broke; what?"

Magdalen never looked more beautiful than at that moment. She drew herself up in her chair. She knew that she had strength on her side, and she spoke to him quietly as she stared out in front of her:

"No. When you've squandered every particle of your capital on — in a degrading way. You understand me, I think, without forcing me to enumerate the cases, or to go into details?"

"I'm not very exceptional in that respect," he answered sullenly.

"When day in and day out you've insulted me," she continued steadily, "and brought disgrace upon your own name and mine, I'm going to do probably the most incomprehensible thing in the world, that only a fool of a woman would be capable of. I'm going to stay with you. That is, if you care for me to do so."

Ware made a sudden movement towards her, but she held up her hand, which stopped him.

"Don't misunderstand me," she went on. "There's no love in it, not an atom. You've killed that and every fragment of respect utterly. But I shall remain under the same roof with you to support you so far as my income will allow, and for so long as we two last out — unless you would prefer me to leave you and make you an allowance. Which do you choose?"

Ware grasped the situation, and, reviewing it entirely from the point of view of his own pocket, without being to any extent weighed down by the contemptible side of it all, turned over in his mind the choice of two evils carefully.

The clock ticked, but no answer came. Magdalen repeated her question: "Which do you choose?"

"Well," he began at length quite casually, "I should be better off, it seems to me, if we were together on the restaurant principle that one portion generally does for two. They do say that somewhere, don't they?"

"That is your choice then?" asked Magdalen, biting her lip.

"Yes, I *think* so," replied Ware calmly. "But where shall we live, I wonder?"

"Oh, a flat somewhere, I suppose. Earl's Court or —"

"Earl's Court! Good God!" And he winced badly.

"Yes, it will be a different story from the last four years. But it has to be done on my income, and you know what that is."

"Under a thousand a year. Ha! ha! Colossal!"

The wife remained in her chair, and once again her chin rested on her hands, and her elbows on her knees, while her

beautiful eyes stared down at the Oriental carpet in lost contemplation of the wonderful twists and curves of its pattern. She found herself counting them—ten to the right, ten to the left. The delicate colouring, too. How exquisitely, she thought, the reds blended into the yellows, the yellows into the greens!

The husband took another cigarette, and tried to light a match. Two or three were obdurate, and he flung them aside. How rotten, he considered, these English matches had become! The Swedish ones were much better! Finally he succeeded in lighting one at the fireplace, and threw it impatiently into the big open grate. It was not extinguished in the process, and Ware watched it. Now that it was alight, of course it wouldn't go out! He was amused. What a jolly little flame, though! How long, he wondered, would it last? The best part of a minute by the watch any day. Obstinate little beggar! Ah, there it goes! How funnily the wax shrivels up!

The two remained locked in their separate "brown studies" for some time. Ware was the first to break the silence as he walked up and down the room.

"It's a hell of a hole this, Magdalen. How the devil am I going to get out?"

"Is there any way out?"

"I can't see it yet. But it may be there. Look here! I've got my back against the wall, see? I've had it there before, and fought through all right."

"Because you've had the means to fall back upon," she answered quietly. "Now they're exhausted."

"Damn, you're right! I must go through the court, that's all. But afterwards, how in the name of heaven are two people like you and me going to exist on a thousand a year?"

"I shall have the control of that, and must do my best."

"And dole me out pocket money! Ha! ha! Ten bob a week, I suppose. Ha! There's humour in everything."

He laughed at the notion mirthlessly and went to the window. He inserted his cigarette into a holder of rare amber, and placing it between his teeth he bit it firmly, thrusting his lower jaw forward, which made the cigarette look skywards.

Such was his attitude for some minutes, with both hands resting on his hips inside the waist of his spotless tennis flannels. The prospect of a flat in Earl's Court and doled-out pocket money was decidedly grey to such a man, and its incongruity appealed to him. Still, he was "in the tumbrel," as he put it, and the situation had to be faced. How, then, could he improve it even to some small extent? What could be engineered to mitigate the struggle? These were his thoughts. He was desperate, there was no doubt about that. He was as desperate, according to his own lights, as Tommy Bold. "What's a man to do when he's desperate?"

He broke the silence at last suddenly:

"Every shilling will be needed," he said.

"Certainly. Every one."

"The more we have, the merrier, eh? Magda, I've just remembered something. Splendid!"

He came to her side excitedly, and employed his most charming manner which, as a rule, he bestowed only upon other people.

"Never say again, my dear, that I can't utilize money in the right direction."

"I don't understand," was Magdalen's perplexed answer.

"Listen, by Jove! Listen. We can increase our income after all—not by very much, I know, but this is a case, you agree, where every bob will make a difference."

"Well?"

Ware continued, his eyes blinking with pleasure:

"The other day you thought something of my suggestion to sell your Great Western Debentures. Wait a bit, my dear, wait a bit. And, damn it! you were wise enough to adopt my suggestion. You did sell 'em. By heaven, you were a genius to do so."

"Perhaps I was. I hope I was," she replied absently.

"At any rate my advice was prompted by the sole wish that you should benefit," he continued charmingly. "And I was only anxious for you to sell at a good profit, which, by Jove! you succeeded in doing, and to reinvest in the Ordinary Stock, which will yield you a better dividend."

"All this sort of thing is so much gibberish to me, you know," said Magdalen with a sad smile.

"But what a lot of doing it took to get you to agree to my proposal!"

"I didn't feel I could trust you."

He bowed to her with dignity and walked away.

"Oh, I'm sorry," was his only answer.

"Hubert, reckless as I know you to be in money matters, and unscrupulous and cruel —"

"Magdalen!"

"Yes, that's what the world would call you if it knew you. Yet at this crisis, which you and I have to face together, I can't believe you would be capable of doing anything detrimental to your own interests."

The thrust went home, and he again bowed low to her.

"Thank you, my dear Magdalen. Thank you — very much."

"So I'll sign the — er — transfer," she went on steadily, "or whatever it's called, whenever you like. Have you it here at hand?"

"I have. I received it from my broker this morning."

Ware unlocked a drawer of his writing table and took out a document, which he perused casually.

"Is there much risk in this new thing I'm going to put the money into?" queried Magdalen, in her effort to put her words into the correct phraseology.

"Safe as the Bank," replied Ware, as he laid the paper down.

He was standing upon one side of the table, and she faced him from the other as she extended her hand.

"Very well, let me sign it," she said wearily.

"Hadn't you better read it through first?"

"Oh, you know perfectly well I shouldn't understand it. Give it me."

"A witness to your signature will be necessary," said Ware, as he handed her the paper.

"Then ring for Rate. Butlers are accustomed to that sort of thing, aren't they?"

Ware was about to touch the bell when Rate at that instant came in from the hall to announce a visitor :

"Mr. Adye."

Magdalen, holding the document in her hand, felt her heart stand still. Ware greeted Michael Adye warmly.

"Why, Adye, you're a stranger, if ever there was one. How are you?"

"Irritated by my car, which has behaved shabbily. Otherwise well. Nothing but delays. Still, here I am"; and he took Magdalen's very little hand in his very big one and steadied it absolutely.

Her face was radiant as she looked at him. The current of her thought was changed completely. Adye had that strange power about him to arrest attention. He created an atmosphere, and it was a charming one.

"But where have you dropped from?" asked Ware.

"The Temple."

"What, in the Vacation!"

"Yes, they won't let us fellows alone for long. No peace for the moderately good, eh, Magdalen? Still, I can't grumble. I've had a pleasant rest at Homburg."

Magdalen looked at his very thin figure incredulously.

"Don't say *you've* been taking the waters?" she laughed out.

"No-o-o," grunted out Adye. "But a pretty place, fine weather and early hours were what I wanted. And we shall be in the thick of a General Election before we know where we are."

"Well, before you tell us your news," said Magdalen, "you can do me a favour."

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Adye boyishly.

"You've just come at the right moment. You can do me a trifling service if you will."

"Only a trifling one?" he answered disappointedly.

"Yes, would you witness my signature?"

Ware, with a quick look of fear, interrupted them.

"But, my dear," he protested, "to bombard a man directly he gets inside the room."

"A lawyer, though, would be a much better witness than a butler, wouldn't he?" she asked with a chuckle.

"Well, he'd be as good," said Adye, laughing. "May I ask the nature of the — document?"

"Why, of course," replied Magdalen.

"Hadn't I better explain?" persisted Ware.

"No, no, no," she argued charmingly. "I think I'm capable of that much. This is how it is, Mike. I want to take some money out of one thing and put it into another."

Adye nodded with the sympathetic look of a man who is an expert in these matters as a woman who knows nothing about them.

"I see. A transfer."

"That's it. My Great Western Debenture Stock. Its title is some long rigmarole like that."

"But is it wise, Magdalen?"

"I hope so."

"I mean," Adye continued, "if both of you will allow me to say so, is it wise at this particular moment — in the present circumstances? It's really — er — on that account I've run down to see you as an old friend. Well —"

He hesitated, and his powerful jaw became very set and underhung as his eyes remained fixed upon the woman he loved.

"I've heard something in my chambers, and — I'm awfully sorry."

He almost hurt her hand in his.

"Thank you, Mike," she whispered.

"Thanks, old chap," said Ware.

"Is it wise?" And Adye repeated the question gravely.

"I don't know," answered Magdalen. "It might be a good thing to try to get a better yearly sum from the capital."

"Yes, but how are you going to reinvest the proceeds?"

Magdalen felt that she soon would be in difficulties in this financial conversation.

"Well, Hubert thought — what did you think, Hubert?"

"I thought Great Western Ordinary," replied Ware.

"Nothing very speculative in that," observed Adye laughingly.

"Debenture Ordinary! Ordinary Debenture! I don't know how you men can remember which is which," said Magdalen in despair.

Adye looked at her, and spoke thoughtfully.

"Is this transfer your own wish?"

"Well, Hubert advised me."

"Still I may have been wrong," interrupted Ware rapidly.

"Of course, of course," agreed Adye. "We can all of us come a howler sometimes."

Magdalen was growing weary of the subject. She approached the writing-table upon which she placed the transfer:

"Well, here it is. So I'll sign it."

"But why be in such a hurry, Magdalen?" asked Ware, completely disguising a deep anxiety which lay hidden behind his words. "Later on, to-morrow, any time will do. Let's chuck all this sort of thing to-day."

"No," she replied. "I like to get things over and off my mind," and she scribbled her signature hastily. "There!"

Adye was close by, and duly saw her write her name. Ware hesitated a moment while Magdalen placed the blotting-paper over the transfer, and then made a distinct forward movement with the object of taking it up. His wife, however, gave the document to Adye.

"Now, it's your turn, isn't it?" she said to him with a laugh.

"Quite right," answered Adye. "But I once had occasion to register an oath which I don't want you or your husband to misunderstand. You won't, I'm sure. I never nowadays witness a signature without just seeing what the thing is all about. So I'll run my eye over it."

"Wise man," said Ware. "But any time will do for that. I'll put the thing away now. Later on, Adye, after we've had a jaw."

Adye had walked a yard or two from them with the

paper in his hand; and Ware gently remonstrated with his wife.

"This is a bit of an infliction on a pal, Magdalen, just as he sets foot inside your house."

"Not in the least, Ware," was Adye's good-natured reply. And he settled himself in a chair to peruse the document.

Adye was a difficult man to move when once he had made up his mind. The slightly underhung jaw was eloquent of that. And anything connected with Magdalen's welfare invariably received his prompt attention, however trifling the matter might be. So there was not another word to be said.

Ware realized this, and his face, averted from the others, wore a look of trouble and exasperation as he walked slowly and thoughtfully to the other side of the room.

Adye frowned suddenly as he began to read the paper to himself. He looked up from it momentarily, and glanced round at the husband and wife, the latter having gone to the window, and the former having taken up his favourite position upon the Adams sofa in company with his twentieth cigarette of that day. Adye was on the point of speaking, of almost calling out, in fact, but he stopped himself. His eyes again fell upon the document, and, riveted upon it, they opened wider as he read on, the whole expression of the powerful face changing from one of amazement to that of sternness and resentment.

What might have been said or done at that moment, had not an opportune or inopportune interruption occurred, it would be difficult to say with certainty. But we need not inquire into that. We have only to stick to facts, and avoid hypotheses, which are tiresome things at the best.

The door from the hall had opened quickly, and Eustace Ede, apparently recovered from his sulks, stood in the room. He was still, as he always was, a vision of the most scrupulous dressing. He had changed his white flannels to grey ones; in place of his collar and tie he had substituted a carefully folded bath towel, and in his hand he carried a bathing-suit.

“Hallo, Mr. Adye, you here!” he squeaked out. “How d’ye do?”

Adye, being a polite member of polite society, instantly placed the document in his coat pocket and rose at once to greet no less a person than Magdalen’s brother.

CHAPTER VII

“**H**OW are you, my boy?” he asked, nearly wringing his hand off.

“Fairly well, thanks, except for the wasps and the heat.” Adye indicated the towel round his neck.

“Going to bathe, eh? Best thing in the heat, Eustace.”

“Yes, it’s about the only time I’ve ever felt inclined for it. This lake’s beastly, you know,” his voice becoming shriller; “it’s so full of big pike, and I’m terrified of ’em.”

“They’ll be much more terrified of you,” replied Adye with a laugh, as he approached the chair he had been sitting in.

“Er — Eustace,” said Ware brightly, who until now had not stirred from his thoughtful attitude upon the sofa. “I’ve sent my letter about you to the Hanover family. I’m sure they’ll look after you all right.”

“Oh, thanks, Hubert,” answered the boy. “I hope you’ve told them, among other things, that I won’t eat prunes with meat.”

Magdalen looked at Adye.

“You know Eustace is off to Hanover on Monday,” she explained. “He’s going to study in a family there for six months.”

“Ah, till he comes of age. Good!” said Adye.

Eustace’s pale, weak face turned towards the K.C.

“Shall I see you when I come back from my bathe, Mr. Adye?”

“I hope so. Meanwhile I’ll watch you from the window here. A great header, eh?”

“No, but you can’t,” replied Eustace with satisfaction. “Thank goodness this end of the lake I stay in, though it is so close, has the advantage of being completely hidden by

the trees. I *hate* to be stared at. And as for headers, I detest 'em. They make me red all down my —”

Ware at the window drowned the remaining word by his laughter, and Magdalen went close to her brother.

“Now, don’t do anything rash, Eustace,” she said in an almost parental tone which made Adye smile. “But you know, Mike, he can only swim about the length of this room. Keep close to the bank, Eustace, and don’t play any tricks with that punt.”

“You know perfectly well I never touch the horrid punt,” he retorted petulantly. “I always go in from the steps.”

“Won’t you get Marston to go down with you?”

“Certainly not, Magda; I’m off with Marston. And he’s perfectly happy on the croquet lawn with Sir Henry and Celia. Besides, I’m all right. How ridiculous you are! See you when I come back, Mr. Adye.”

The boy put on an exceedingly smart white Homburg hat, and passed out through the window to the terrace, receiving on his way a sympathetic pat on the shoulder from his brother-in-law, who offered him his cigarette case.

“Thanks, Hubert. Are these the new ones from Cairo?”

“The very same.”

“I must get some,” said the boy, striking a match.

“Nonsense. You can pinch as many of mine as you like, old chap.”

“Hubert,” whispered Eustace, “you’re the only one who’s been decent to me all day.”

With that tolerably accurate assertion the spoilt youth took his departure alone, and sauntered to the left along the terrace towards the west side of the estate. He descended the steps at the end, and for a few minutes was not averse from postponing his dip and resting upon a shady seat at a lower level of the garden. Even these few yards had caused him to feel the heat. Most people were feeling it, but he more than most. He was a delicate creature, and inevitably so; an only son, who in his babyhood, when he should have been breathing oxygen, was generally hermetically sealed in hot rooms by anxious, but misguided parents. In winter the child never slept with an open window, blazing fires

roared up the chimneys, and if the wind was in the east, he never was allowed out under any conditions. Interfering friends who ventured, however tactfully, to advise a contrary treatment were considered inimical at once; enlightened consulting physicians of the twentieth century, who advocated air, were credited with new-fangled notions, received their fee promptly, and never were consulted again; and this boy, in spite of his coddling, was actually alive, and close upon his twenty-first birthday. But he would have been a very different specimen had he been reared in a healthy fashion and not like an exotic. It was a criminal upbringing, and his parents deserved any punishment. As it was, they were ordered oxygen upon their death-beds, and from its administration received, it is said, such a shock that their ends was considerably accelerated.

It was not that Eustace was unsound in limb or body, but that he lacked stamina. He was a weakling, and would be designated by his best friends as a "poor thing." Coddled to a wicked degree physically, he was pampered and spoilt morally. A governess followed by a private tutor at home were all that he received in the way of educational advantages. He never was whipped, never got hurt at a game, never was "fagged," never had a chance. And now that he was reaching "man's estate" the tree was inclined just as the twig had been bent. Magdalen had had many a passage of arms with her parents over his upbringing, but she was invariably snubbed for her pains, and it is not surprising that there was little in common between the brother and sister, so diametrically opposed to each other were they.

He was rather a pathetic figure as he sat upon the seat, with his sleek, fair hair licked back from his forehead, his pale face, and his always parted lips, ruminating over the "nasty things" people said to him, and furiously flicking away the cigarette-ash which had dared to soil his new flannels. But he was a very ordinary type, and in six months' time and onwards would doubtless be tolerated for his money and his card-gift, which was his only accomplishment.

Feeling distinctly cooler, and having finished Ware's ex-

cellent cigarette, he caught sight of the far end of the lake about half a mile off, the near part which he patronized being hidden from him, and supposed that, having said he would bathe, he must go through with it. The walk to the shed in the heat, the undressing when he got there, and the creeping into the "horrid cold water," were decidedly irksome to him. He would go and look at it first. That was his decision. Accordingly he rose wearily from the garden-seat, and walked slowly down through the park in the direction of the bathing-shed. His pace was very different from that of his sister who such a short while ago had traversed in part the same ground. And how different were the workings of their minds! To her the water was a magnet, and she needed the most powerful deterrent to thwart her in her purpose. To him it was repellent, and if upon his quest of a very doubtful pleasure he could have encountered some one to suggest another form of amusement, he would have seconded the motion with considerably alacrity. But he met nobody on his way, and arrived at the bathing-shed alone. However, there were signs of life within. Marston Gurney's wet footprints were still visible upon the boarded floor, and his lately worn bathing-suit was hanging from a peg.

Eustace's face grazed it by accident as he tripped forward over the leg of a chair, and the damp touch of it was distinctly unpleasant and chilling to him. It made him pause a little longer before undressing, and he sat down upon the top step to study the look of the water. There was not a ripple upon it, and it shimmered brilliantly in the sun. Everything about it was alluring to a keen bather, and had Eustace Ede been a member of that fraternity he would have been off with his clothes, on to the spring-board, and into the deep water in the space of a very few seconds.

But he still hesitated, and finally, stretching down his hand by the side of the steps, dipped the tips of his fingers to test the temperature. Even he was relieved by the experiment, and, re-entering the shed, unfolded his bathing-suit and began very deliberately to undress.

That proceeding being purely of a conventional and in-

elegant character, it would be superfluous to describe it. It may safely be left to the imagination. And, moreover, for the moment it may not be without interest to know what was taking place in the library between those three people — Sir Hubert Ware, Magdalen, and Michael Adye, the last-mentioned of whom had plainly grasped the purport of the document he was reading.

On Eustace's departure the eyes of the two men met, and Ware, with his customary resource, suggested to his wife, if she would not mind, the advisability of leaving him for a few minutes alone with Adye, as he would like to consult him about things generally.

"Of course," replied Magdalen.

She walked out of the door-window, and disappeared from view to the east side of the terrace, leaving the two men alone.

They stood motionless for some seconds. Adye then extracted the paper from his pocket, and with a grave and thoughtful look upon his face crossed slowly to the other side of the room. He had to speak, he knew; he adored the woman whose signature he was asked to witness; and he had to speak to the man who was her husband — and in his own house. How should he begin? He hesitated for some time. No cross-examination in his career had ever demanded such delicate handling. No case in his life had been so difficult to conduct. He sat down upon the sofa mechanically, not looking to the right nor to the left. And the man, who stood between him and the woman of his life, followed his every movement searchingly.

At length Adye broke the painful silence.

"Er — Ware —"

"Hallo!" answered the other affably as he approached the writing-table.

"I — er — don't follow quite this — er — transfer," said Adye quietly, as he held up the paper in his hand. "It's — er — not what your wife imagines it to be."

"Isn't it?" said Ware perplexedly.

"No. It's something entirely different"; and Adye, rising from the sofa, walked up to his side.

"Different? Er—how? I—I don't follow. I—"

Adye looked close into his face and scrutinized it.

"Nothing could be plainer," he said in a firmer tone. "And I must be candid. You're trying without your wife's knowledge to obtain her signature to a deed which, if duly executed, would transfer the whole of her capital in this investment to *your* name, and give you the power to do what you liked with it. The stock has not been sold, Ware, and you know it."

"Adye," answered Ware, in his turn raising his voice, "you're bringing rather a serious charge." Adye did not remove his eyes from his. "It's calculated to make me forget you're a guest in my house—a fact which apparently you have lost sight of."

"I had for the moment, I admit," answered Adye. "And you must forgive me if the gravity of the case appears to me more important, particularly when it concerns one of my closest friends. You also are forgetting that your wife asked me to witness her signature. I didn't offer to do so. But I understand you dispute the conclusion I've come to."

"I do!"

"And that your wife is wholly cognizant of the purport of this—document?"

"Yes!"

"Then in that case it will be for me to tell her that I must decline to witness her signature to a deed which is so entirely different from what she understood. I'll go to her now."

"No, no!" cried Ware, clutching him by the arm. "Don't—don't mention it to my wife."

"But it's my duty."

"Wait, for God's sake!" gasped Ware. "My—wife's been—awfully good to me."

"I know she has."

"And this might—" Ware broke off nervously.

"Was I right then?" continued Adye, close to him. "You *were* deceiving her?"

"Yes," was the other's answer, as he hung his head and sank into a chair.

"Oh-h!" exclaimed Adye with all the scorn at his command.

"I—I've been almost driven mad," Ware protested wildly. "I didn't—I didn't realize what I was doing. I don't know where to turn!"

"Except away from your wife."

It was a terse reply, but Adye clothed it in a tone of the most withering contempt, which had its effect upon Ware. It silenced him completely for some time. Never in all his life had he felt so insignificant, and he smarted under the realization that Adye knew him. It was the first time that he had been found out, and it was not a pleasant sensation. How far, too, it might lead was exercising his mind. Would Adye take advantage of his knowledge and expose him? And if he did, how was he to act? Could he face the charge boldly, and deny its truth? Could he bring an action for slander against Adye, and perhaps ruin him when he was practically at the height of his career? There would be some satisfaction in that if he could but be sure of success. But could he be sure of it? Would a shrewd man like Adye be likely to have blundered so egregiously? Would he not, on the other hand, be so experienced as to perceive instantly the nature of that document? He found no answer to that question. What, then, was he to do? He had admitted his attempted fraud. Adye was in possession of the secret. He must keep it, then. At all costs he must keep it! How could he make him keep it?

If ever a man was desperate, Sir Hubert Ware was that man as these various reflections surged through his mind.

Adye watched him during those silent moments, and although he had never liked him, for more reasons than one, he was now face to face with the awful knowledge that not only was the woman he loved the wife of another man, but that she was chained for life to a blackguard and a cheat. It was a staggering blow to him. He fairly reeled under it. It was incredible. It was unthinkable. It was cruel. Those were his meditations rushing higgledy-piggledy through his brain, and the corners of his strong mouth

turned up expressively as one more thought seized hold of him.

"For better—for worse! Great heaven! Couldn't the Divorce Commission have recommended reform in a case like this?"

Ware, at length turning his eyes towards the strong, unshakeable face, sprang up suddenly and hastened to Adye's side.

"What are you going to do, Adye?" he whispered fearfully. "What are you going to do?"

"I don't know," was the slow reply.

"You'll be merciful, though, won't you?" And he laid an appealing hand upon the other's shoulder. "Be merciful! You've known me off and on for a longish time, and you'd never have thought this of me, would you? At least you can tell me that!"

"That is perfectly true," answered Adye steadily.

"Well, then, something must have gone wrong with me! Something must have snapped, and made me do what I didn't realize! I realize it now. It was an awful thing, and I could shoot myself for it. Yes, I could, Adye. Forget it—forget it, man, for God's sake! After the thing was signed I would have burnt it—on my oath I would. Why, I was cheating my own wife!"

"Yes!" said Adye between his teeth, as he hissed out the word.

"I see it now. I didn't see it then. I didn't see anything. Be merciful, Adye. I'm a ruined man! I'm done! Don't tell my wife! I implore you not to tell her. It—it would pain her terribly, and —"

"Yes, I think it would pain her," agreed Adye ironically.

"Then you won't, will you? Don't tell her! Don't tell her! Let us tear the damned thing up and forget it ever existed. Don't tell her!"

Such was the almost incoherent outburst from the charming, handsome, well-groomed, self-possessed, *débonair* man whom we had seen only a few minutes ago. He stood gripping the K.C.'s shoulders with his trembling hands, stripped of all those qualities, and Adye could not recognize

him. His graceful figure seemed shrivelled, his faultless clothes ill-fitting, his eyes contracted, and his face wizened as the sweat poured down it. He was a creature at bay.

Adye took hold of his hands, and put them away from him firmly.

"No, I won't tell her," he said coldly.

"Nor anyone — nor anyone in the world?"

"It would pain her equally if I did that."

"Thanks — thanks," whispered Ware weakly.

With that he walked away to a table near the sofa, and mixed himself a fairly strong whisky and soda, which he drank off greedily, while Adye sat thoughtfully in an arm-chair not heeding him. It revived him considerably, and, mopping his face and neck with his handkerchief, he gradually reassumed his normal appearance.

"Whisky and soda, Adye?"

"No, thanks."

"Sure?"

"Quite."

Ware looked at him with relief, and with just a suspicion of victory in his eye, while he readily admitted to himself that Adye had acted generously. The inevitable cigarette helped further to restore his equilibrium.

"If the result comes through, I'll let you know, Marston."

The words were called out from the terrace by Magdalen to Gurney, who was helping Celia in her game of croquet with Egerton.

"My wife's coming back," said Ware quickly. "What shall you say?"

"You must leave that to my discretion," replied Adye coldly as he stood up. "Meanwhile," he continued, placing the miserable document in his coat pocket, and tapping it, "I think my pocket is the safest place for this. I'll burn it when I get home. Of course the dividends will continue to be credited in your wife's pass-book, as the stock is not sold; but the words 'Great Western' will probably be sufficient for an unsuspecting mind like your wife's."

There was a tone of sadness in these last seven words, which did not escape Ware.

"She mustn't see we've had an argument even," he said quickly. "Take a cigarette."

Adye ignored the invitation, and took out his own case.

"I have one here," he answered frigidly, and he lit it calmly.

Magdalen returned from the terrace, and regarded casually the two men, who both appeared to have had a thoroughly amicable five minutes' talk.

"Well, can I come back?" she asked.

"Yes, we've quite finished," replied Ware brightly.

"Have you witnessed my signature, Mike?"

"Yes, it's all done," was Adye's bold answer.

Ware could not repress a secret smile. He thought Adye magnificent; and he turned to his wife naturally in his determination to keep up Adye's deception.

"How lucky it was he came, eh?"

"Mike always brings good luck," agreed Magdalen as she sat upon the settee. "Er — Hubert, aren't you leaving Sir Henry rather a long time?"

"By Jove!" exclaimed Ware, "I'd forgotten all about him."

He hurried to the window, and looked out towards the croquet lawn.

"But he's fairly occupied with Celia and Marston at croquet. Interminable game, don't you think so, Adye? He's eyeing a hoop as if it was a chess-problem."

Ware had recovered his self-possession marvellously. As he strolled out to the terrace, inhaling his cigarette, no on-looker would have detected a care. Adye's promise was responsible for that. One load was lifted from his mind, but another remained. How could ruin and Earl's Court be avoided? How?

Magdalen had now crossed to an arm-chair, and taken up the silk waistcoat she was at work upon. Adye's eyes watched her intently. She looked round at the window, and saw that her husband had disappeared. Adye, too, was aware of it. He brought up his chair near Magdalen's. The two were alone together. They sat silently for some time. She plied her needle determinedly. He watched it closely as it worked in and out of the canvas.

CHAPTER VIII

MAGDALEN was the first to speak, when, on looking up from the waistcoat, she found Adye's eyes fixed upon her.

"Isn't he amazing?" she said.

Adye was so far away in his thoughts that for the moment he did not follow the reference. He regarded her inquiringly.

"Hubert, I mean," she explained. "Don't you think he's extraordinary?"

"I've come across many in my work, Magdalen, who bear a strong family likeness to him."

"But to look at him you'd never realize the state of his affairs, would you?"

"Nor a good many other things," Adye answered quietly, as he thought of the painful interview he had just endured.

"Magdalen," he continued diffidently, after a pause, "I'm awfully grieved at what I've heard. That's why I've come down — to see if I can help in any way at all."

"Thanks, Mike. That's just like you, but there's nothing that anyone can do — nothing."

"You would command me, though, wouldn't you, if there was any mortal thing I could do for you?"

"Of course I would, Mike. You know that."

"You wouldn't hesitate one second?"

There was an earnest ring in the question, and an indescribable force behind it which made the beautiful woman cease working. The various coloured silks seemed to dance before her, and she dropped a skein upon the floor. He picked it up and laid it on her knee. No framed answer came to her lips, but she turned her head towards him, and the wonderful grey-blue eyes looked through him. They penetrated into the very depths of his heart. They under-

stood completely. But whether they did or did not was not the problem which just then was gripping Adye's mind. He had but the one devouring thought which had haunted him for years, and at this moment it overwhelmed him more utterly than ever. He adored her with all the strength of his being. She was to him the embodiment of all that was fine and beautiful, deserving every joy that the world could give her, all the love that it contained, all the understanding and sympathy that existed. By heaven! she was only twenty-five; it was her right! And she was the wife of a man who had tried to cheat her!

As he looked at her now he could have flung away all self-restraint, all convention, all wisdom, all honour. He could have cried aloud that the world did not count, that she and he could defy it together, that nothing on the earth mattered. He could have lifted her in his arms and crushed the very misery out of her. He could have pulverized it with his love. But no, she was to him too noble a thing for that. He must fight on, and for her sake try to play the silent man to the end. He must endure.

He had risen rapidly from his chair, and walked away from her. There was safety in distance.

"At any rate, I may obtain a promise from you," he said quietly.

"A promise? What?"

"Never to undertake any financial transaction before consulting me, no matter what it may be. That's to say if you value my opinion, and I'm not too — inquisitive."

"Of course I promise. You know how I value your opinion, Mike, and for you to talk of being inquisitive is perfectly horrid."

"That's quite understood then?"

"I've given you my promise," answered Magdalen with a smile. "But why do you insist upon it so?"

"Oh, nothing," he replied casually. "I don't want you to make a mistake, that's all. It's precious easy to do so, you know, over investments. Over this one just now I almost feel a little hurt at your not consulting me beforehand. I do indeed."

"But you've been such a stranger of late, Mike. And then you were abroad and —"

"Well, at any rate, no harm's done." And he added gallantly: "And I'm glad you had no other witness than — yours — affectionately."

He returned to her side and resumed his seat.

"You're the same dear old rock as ever," she said, slowly shaking her head. "How good you are!"

"Good!" he exclaimed. "Why, for *you* I'd —"

He looked away from her, and she understood. She, too, felt how she loved this man. But, with that inscrutable power of concealment possessed by women, she showed nothing. There was no occasion for her to walk to the other side of the room. She retained her seat composedly, so it seemed, while all the time, in fact, she was picturing to herself the happiness that might have been hers and the love that she could have given.

"I have a terrible piece of news for you, Mike," she said with an effort. "Hubert's ruined."

Adye nodded silently, and she continued with a shudder:

"I suppose before many days are over his affairs will be public property?"

"I'm afraid so," he said very gently. "I wanted to break it to you that some papers came to my chambers this morning bearing on them."

"Mike," she inquired anxiously, "nothing — dishonourable? Horrible, loathsome, perhaps, but nothing fraudulent? Ah, give me that grain of comfort if you can!"

"No, no, no," he replied truthfully and reassuringly; "nothing of that kind, on my honour."

"Ah-h!" she cried with relief. "It was wrong of me to hint at such a thing. Forget it, will you? Hubert's reckless and all that, I know, but I can't believe he would be capable of anything — But sometimes I get frightened, and — oh, forget I ever said such a thing, won't you?"

"Of course," said Adye, with a face like a mask.

"I must be fair to him, Mike."

"Yes, you must be fair," agreed Adye, in a level tone.

And there he was, sitting by her side, watching the tragedy of her innocence.

"No," he continued. "Those papers of mine just point to — an inevitable bankruptcy of large dimensions. But any brief in which your name appeared I should, of course, return."

"Oh, it's the ghastly publicity of it all — the disgrace! And not a shadow of an excuse to be found! Only a humiliating *cause*!"

"Yes," said Adye strongly. "It's terrible for you, and damnably cruel."

She rose from her chair, and crossed the room restlessly. A set expression came over her face, and she returned to Adye's side.

"I don't know if you'll think I'm doing right," she said, "but whatever my life may have been, and whatever it may have in store for me, I want to be able to hold my head up. I want to do my duty. We shall have to live somewhere upon my income entirely, such as it is."

He could have cried out in protest, but he set his lips, and looked at her with all the self-repression that was in him.

"So I have resolved," she continued, "to stay with him in order to support him."

There was a great silence for a minute. The big clock ticked loudly and solemnly. There was a warning note in its sound. Adye stood up slowly with a look of torture upon his face, and, with his hands linked tightly behind his back and his head bent forward, walked away from her towards the large, open grate. There was safety in distance again.

Her gaze followed him, and if, instead of staring at his foot, which rested on the stone curb, he had turned round then and seen the light in her eyes, in which the very heart and soul and body of the woman were revealed, he would have forbidden her that martyrdom, he would have denied her right to endure it, he would have claimed her as his own. But he did not stir, and muttered through his teeth half-admiringly, half-bitterly:

"Magdalen, the more you are tried the more noble you become. You're—very strong."

"I want to be," she murmured.

He came to her side again hastily—the moth to the light.

"Can't I help you?" he cried, with a passionate ring in his voice.

"No, no, Michael," she answered fearfully. "I want to be strong enough to come through this alone."

"If only you would let me help you!" he continued vehemently. "I should like to feel I was the one creature in all the world who *could* help you—in any way you chose. I have known you a long time now, Magdalen—five years, isn't it? Not that that gives me any right to—Still I'd give the world—!"

He broke the remainder with a tremendous effort. Then, with a stifled exclamation, he turned away from her, and hastened to the window. There was safety in distance again.

The two were suffering indescribably. Each had the same thoughts as the other. Each was fighting to hold them down. They lived in the world. At all costs they must not utter them. Once spoken, they never could be withdrawn. The distance they would lead would be incalculable. They would seal a bond of dishonour. They lived in the world. Something would be lost which, by the canons of society, would be beyond recall. They lived in the world. They would both be hurled down into that abyss which no provocation, no excuse will palliate. The life of each would be shattered, smashed. Nothing but a wreck would remain. They would have jettisoned all. They lived in the world. Each, too, was thinking of the other. Was he going brazenly to blast her life, to drag her down roughly from the high pedestal she occupied, to make her laughed at, pointed at, mocked? Or could he descend to ask her to lower herself to that fashionable and sordid level, which meant church-going on Sundays and intrigue through the week? Why, he loved her!

Was she, in her turn, the woman to blind herself to his career and to his fine position? Was she going to speak

one dangerous word to imperil them? Was she going to deal that one blow to end them irrevocably? Could she live on and endure the sight of the face in the glass, which had been capable of that? Why, she loved him! Besides, all the time there were beating into her brain those words: "If thou faint in the day of adversity thy strength is small."

The clock continued to tick the seconds loudly. It seemed to speak.

"Stay — stay — stay," it rapped out monotonously, and Adye could have smashed its face. He remained silent at the window, and turned the money in his pocket over and over. Something had to be said, he felt, and he snatched at a platitude.

"Pity one can't see the bathing from here," he said jerkily.

Magdalen adopted his tone readily.

"Yes," she replied casually, "the trees just hide this end of the lake, and it's only about a hundred yards. If we had been able to stay on here it might have been worth while, perhaps, to cut some of them down."

This remark in itself was harmless enough, but it bore upon the ruin of the house, and dragged Adye back tempestuously to its tragedy. He rushed to her side.

"Oh, it maddens me," he exclaimed, "when I look at you and see you, the same girl I knew five years ago without a care, now enduring a — I can't believe people like you are sent here for that! The whole management of things is grotesque and farcical! It makes me rebel!"

"It's no use rebelling, Mike," she said lightly. "It has to be borne."

"To be borne!" he echoed with contempt. "That's the eternal cry. Why should it be borne by those who don't contribute one stone to the burden? That's what I should like to fathom. That's why I rebel. Why, I'm hearing the same story more or less every day of my life. The bang of the knocker at my chambers nine times out of ten is the signal for it. It's everlastingly the case of a wholly innocent creature bending under the load of some wrong, some cruelty heaped upon her by some callous brute who is prob-

ably a most popular member of his club and spoken of there as a poor chap who has a roughish time at home. Ah, Magdalen, it's a miserable, monotonous tale. 'Common Form,' as we lawyers say, in our day's work, listened to and handled by us invariably in the same dull, heavy, machine fashion. It's only when we find those we—care for, struggling to support the weight, that we wake up and rebel!"

"Yes, Mike," she said, "but you see my position."

"I do see your position," he cried out, "and it's torture to look on."

"All the argument in the world can't change it, Michael. There it is—a hard, big, solid fact which has got to be met and endured. I must simply buckle to, like the rest. After all, I shall only be following the advice I know you'd give to any client in the same plight. I must try to get an interest out of it—an excitement."

"Excitement!"

"Yes, of endeavouring to make both ends meet. It will be quite a novel experience."

"Which, apart from all this," insisted Adye strongly, "ought to be unthinkable in your case?"

"How do you mean?"

"Why, if your father's will had been a just one."

"Oh!" exclaimed Magdalen dully.

"Eustace to come into all that money! You to be dependent upon his death! It's a scandal it wasn't different. It could have been fairly divided, to say the least of it."

"Yes," she said with a laugh, "but you see my father was no advocate of woman's rights. And, poor dear, he didn't bargain for my marriage turning out like this. He pictured me being always a rich woman as Hubert's wife."

"And being treated—decently," exclaimed Adye. "To stand here and listen to your talk of trying to make both ends meet is appalling."

"The worst of it all is that I'm so helpless," she said thoughtfully, "so dreadfully helpless. I can't do anything. If I could type, write shorthand, do accounts—oh, Mike, fancy my doing accounts!—it would be something. Stop a bit, though, I might run a hat shop. If I can do nothing

else I *can* trim a hat, that I know I can do. But for a hat shop you want capital, don't you?"

The whole conversation was unbearable to Adye, who looked away from her.

"Of course there is one thing I could do," she continued very thoughtfully. "I could go upon the stage."

"Oh-h!"

"Yes, I could. I'm not fool enough not to know that I have a certain amount of looks. And on the English stage looks are the principal thing, aren't they? Of course I should never be able to act, I know that perfectly well. But I might get into the front row in some musical comedy or other. Don't think me frightfully vain, but I believe I might be useful there."

"Magdalen!"

"And I can sing, as you know. It's not a big voice, of course, but with the help of a pretty frock it *might* do."

"For God's sake don't talk like this!"

"I'm trying to be practical," she protested brightly. "I've got to be, you see."

"I can't bear it, that's all. I implore you to stop before you make me say what afterwards I'd give the world to undo!"

He seized both her hands in his, and looked into her eyes as she rose from her chair.

"You shan't utter another word. My God! you shan't!" he whispered madly.

It was the crucial moment of their interview; the climax they had both struggled to avoid. But it stole in upon them unawares. It crept out stealthily from the innocent prattle of a beautiful young woman who was trying, according to her light, to wear a brave face and to meet things boldly and sensibly. She did not bargain for the effect her words would produce upon a man like Adye, or she would have remained dumb. They shook him utterly, and with a rush he gripped her hands so violently as to cause her an exquisite pain. The vibration of his suffering swept through her. She was helpless! She was at his mercy! She was loved! She was alive! But life, honour, blame, all could go! The

world was dead, and what did it matter? One solitary word from him then, as they stood there close together, her hands held fast in his, and no secret would exist between them. In another fraction of a second everything most cherished would be beyond recall. A woman, beautiful in her youth, beautiful in her nature, loved and honoured by all who knew her, tottered defencelessly upon the edge of that yawning chasm which lurks triumphantly in every region of the world, defying all creeds and sermons, all lessons and experience, all civilization, only to make of her, if she fell, an ordinary miserable, broken thing.

Why, then, did she not cry out? Why did she not rebel? Why did she not shrink from the consequence? It only required that, the grey-blooded would say, and Adye would release her hands if that was all the trouble! What a delightfully simple remedy, and how easily applied to love and passion! The answer to the grey-bloods, if they are worth answering, is that she was a human being and she loved him.

Then they would examine Adye's conduct. It would shock them considerably, poor things!

What was he about? This universally popular and respected man, this brilliant member of the Bar, this eloquent politician, this trusted representative of a great constituency, this certain Attorney-General in the next Government at the age of thirty-seven, this eventual occupant of the Woolsack and "Keeper of the King's Conscience," what are we to think of him, crushing the hands of a married woman? Who would have thought it after seeing him in his robes in court only last summer addressing the jury upon the moral decrepitude of a co-respondent? What did he mean by it? Why couldn't he let her go? The answer to the grey-bloods is the same—that he was a human being and he loved her, a condition of affairs they never will be able to understand so long as they are privileged to creep about the world.

But at that supreme moment of their lives, when they stood literally upon the brink of disaster, a sudden, extraneous circumstance occurred, which caused Adye in-

stantly to free her. It was a voice some few yards away upon the terrace that broke in upon them mercifully. It saved Adye from the utterance of the fatal word; it preserved Magdalen from the sealing of an irretrievable compact. A beautiful creature emerged from the fray unsoiled. She could still cling to her ideals, and resolve afresh never to lose them. She was not meant to fall.

"Halloa, Adye, how are you?" said Egerton, shaking him by the hand.

Adye then greeted Gurney, and the chatter on croquet would doubtless have been continued had not the telephone upon the table rung at that moment. Gurney hurriedly looked at his watch.

"That's the race," he said rather breathlessly.

"Yes, now for your fate, Marston," joined in Ware.

"And mine," said Egerton with a laugh.

"And mine," added Celia nervously.

"The Leger, eh?" observed Adye to Magdalen. "I meant to go to Doncaster last night."

Magdalen nodded, and the telephone continued to ring.

Gurney stood by it, and swallowed with difficulty several times.

"You answer it, Celia," he said at length.

"Er — shall I?" she answered, shaking with nervousness, to the amusement of all the older hands.

"Quick, or they'll cut us off," insisted Gurney.

She took up the receiver with a trembling hand and nearly dropped it.

"Y-e-e-s?" she said into the instrument. "Who-o-o is it? — Turnford?"

"Yes, that's the chap," snapped out Gurney.

"Ye-e-s," she continued in the same shaky condition. "I'm Mrs. Gurney."

"Never mind who *you* are," exclaimed Gurney wildly.

She let the receiver fall with a cry, and covered her face with her hands. There was a dead silence for a moment, and Gurney's expression was almost terrible to look upon.

"'Aeroplane' — beaten?" he gasped.

Celia became hysterical and could barely speak.

"N-n-n-o!" she cried. "It's — it's — it's — won!"

"Won?" shrieked Gurney.

"Yes — won, won, won!"

Gurney with a loud "whoop!" flung up his hat to the ceiling and burst into a fit of uncontrollable laughter. Then, realizing that this exhibition was childish, he gradually assumed the perfectly composed air of a man of the world and a habitual frequenter of the race-course.

"Capital," said Egerton; "you got thirty-three to one, you told me?"

Gurney nodded with a smile, and lit a cigarette.

"Good!" exclaimed Ware.

"Well done, Marston! Hurrah!" said Magdalen, clapping her hands.

Celia drew herself up proudly.

"Yes, but I backed him too," she protested, with a jerk of her head.

"Heavily?" enquired Adye through his laughter.

"Very," she replied haughtily, "a fiver each way."

They were all congratulating the girl, and a merry chatter of voices continued, when Rate entered the room hurriedly from the hall, looking more pained than usual, and with an expression of alarm on his face. No one noticed him. So he came to Ware, who was standing a little distance from the others, and spoke to him quietly.

"Can I speak to you a moment, Sir Hubert?" he asked in a serious whisper.

"Yes; what is it?" inquired Ware.

"In the hall, Sir Hubert, if you don't mind."

Ware interrupted the others in their racing talk.

"Just excuse me for a moment, will you?" he said.

And he passed out into the hall, followed by Rate, who closed the door after him.

"Now, Marston, how much had you on? I quite forgot that," said Celia.

"Well, I'll tell you," replied Gurney. "I — er — I did rather a bold thing, you know, but I felt pretty reckless. I — er — have a bit of capital, and — well, I have a bit of capital —"

"Yes, I know that," said Celia. "Do go on."

"I put three hundred on to win," he said with a rush.

"Three hundred!" exclaimed his wife, immediately setting to work to make an elaborate calculation on her fingers.

"Three hundred!" said the others.

Celia was nearly hysterical again from excitement.

"Then you've—you've won—?"

"Yes, I've won just one ten thousand," he answered.

"Splendid, Marston!" exclaimed Magdalen, enthusiastically. "I'm so glad."

Egerton and Adye strolled to the window, both of them recapitulating "Aeroplane's" history, and Gurney came to Magdalen's side.

"But I had an idea when I made this bet," he said to her quietly. "Celia will tell you what it was."

Celia ran to Magdalen, while Gurney modestly walked across to the fireplace.

"Marston really made the bet for someone else," she whispered to Magdalen; "er—for me. And now we want to know if—if it could be arranged for you to have it."

The tears rushed to Magdalen's eyes, and she took the girl in her arms. At length she said to them tenderly: "You dear things, both of you! I wouldn't hear of such a thing."

The door leading to the hall burst open violently, and there rushed into the library a man pale as death and barely recognizable. There was a complete hush as everyone turned to him. It was Ware. He stood in the centre of the room, to the alarm of everybody, trembling from head to foot, and clinging to the writing-table. The sweat poured down his livid face, and he held out a shaking hand in front of him in his frantic effort to frame some words.

Egerton rushed to his side to support him. Adye stood stark still where he was, staring at him. What had happened? Was this man unable to face the ruin? Had he tried to kill himself? The same question rushed to Magdalen's mind. Her face became as livid as his.

"Hubert!" she cried, "what is it?"

There was silence again, and Ware, raising his ashen face, tried vainly to speak as he shivered like a man with ague.

"I'll get a doctor," said Egerton emphatically.

"My car's here," agreed Adye, feeling convinced of the correctness of his diagnosis; "the man can drive there at once if they tell him where to go."

"No, no," gasped Ware, as with Egerton's support he sank into a chair by the table.

"I—I—I'm all right. It isn't that. Magdalen!" he called out vehemently.

"What's the matter?" she asked fearfully, as she rushed to his side.

"I don't know what to say," he continued with gathering strength. "Rate—Rate called me out just now to tell me, and—"

"Yes?"

"Eustace!"

He could barely pronounce the name, but it was heard by them all.

"What—what?" cried Magdalen.

"The—the gardener, Durnwell—"

"Yes, yes?"

"He—he went to the—bathing-shed—a few moments ago!"

There was a general movement of alarm within the room.

"He—he—found Eustace's towel and—clothes there—his flannels he was wearing here—in this room—just now. But—but the—boy—is *not* there. He's—!"

His wife stopped him with a stifled shriek as she realized the truth. She reeled back into Celia's arms.

Magdalen was a wealthy woman.

CHAPTER IX

WILBURY was plunged into a state of panic.

The first thing to be done was to remove Magdalen as soon as possible to her room in the care of Celia, and to telephone for the doctor. It was Ware's suggestion directly he could collect his thoughts.

"We must get the women out of the way," he whispered anxiously to Adye.

Adye agreed. And Celia, after a sign from him, assisted Magdalen from the library, while Gurney rang up Dr. Seddleton to come immediately. The shock to Magdalen, whose nervous system had already been sufficiently overstrained, was very great. She stood up with her little friend's arm pressed close around her, and appeared to see nobody. She swayed for a moment, and then staggered out into the hall, her teeth chattering violently. There, a few yards beyond the oak staircase, a large panelled door, leading eventually by means of a long corridor to the servants' quarters, stood ajar—a most unusual circumstance considering that it was one of those doors fitted with the necessary appliance to close it automatically. But this was an unusual occasion, and it was, perhaps, not altogether unnatural in the circumstances that the eternal curiosity below stairs about the passing events above them should assume abnormal proportions. That door, in fact, was being held open by a knot of excited people composed of the Wilbury household, who did not want to lose one word or action if they could possibly avoid it. There was Rate with his footmen, the *chef* with his kitchen-maids, the kitchen-maids with their scullery-maids, the upper-housemaids with their under-housemaids, all of whom had the fixed and morbid determination not to miss anything. They were all packed close together, elbowing and jostling each other with one eye upon the crack of the door and the other upon Durnwell, one of the under-gardeners, who had made the terrible discovery. They were bom-

barbing him feverishly with questions. In their estimation and in his own he was undoubtedly the hero of the hour, and he gave his answers with considerable self-importance, surrounding them with a mystery which was wholly unnecessary.

"Well, Durnwell," sneered the second housemaid, "you doesn't seem able to tell us much."

"Did yer see Mister Eustace in the water first?" asked William, the footman.

"No, I did not," replied Durnwell emphatically. "I never sees 'im after 'e passes me in the garden on 'is way to the shed. I was goin' in tother direction."

"Then 'ow do yer know 'e went into it at all?"

"Because I found 'is clothes afterwards, I did. That's why. 'E wouldn't take 'is clothes orf to run about the grounds naked, would 'e?"

"Where is the poor young gentleman now then?" queried the head housemaid.

"Why, at the bottom, of course, and 'eld down fast."

"Is it deep there?"

"About ten foot a few yards out, and there be some tidy weeds."

"There'll be a hinqwest, won't there, Mr. Rate?" asked one of the kitchen-maids excitedly.

"There'll be an inquest undoubtedly," replied Rate pompously, omitting the *h* with much superiority, "the law commands it."

"And you, Durnwell, 'ull 'ave to witness and tell all yer know," joined in another kitchen-maid.

"I tells all I sees, I do," rejoined the gardener.

"'Ow did 'er ladyship take it, Mr. Rate?" inquired the head housemaid.

"I am unable to answer that question, Miss Thompson, was Rate's reply. "I was not present."

"Not much love lost between that brother and sister," continued Thompson. "That's why I asked."

"Ssh! Hold your jaw, will you?" whispered Rate, who at that moment caught sight of Magdalen and Celia as they passed through the hall to the staircase.

The excited household pressed forward eagerly to get a glimpse of their mistress, but Rate held them back with a strong arm, and secured the best view for himself through the narrow chink, while the rest craned their necks forward in breathless silence to catch any syllable that might be uttered. But not a word was spoken, and the only sound which reached them was the intermittent, slow, unsteady step of a nerve-shattered woman as her feet passed haltingly over those portions of the oak floor which were exposed between the handsome rugs. Celia led her to the wide stairs gently and firmly, and as they mounted them, stopping here and there upon the way, a shaft of blinding light through a great window blazed in upon them from a ball of fire in the sky. So overpowering was its strength that it held Magdalen quite still for some seconds. She stood pale and motionless under its rays, with her heavy eyelids forcibly closed and their long, thick, dark lashes lying upon her cheeks like hedgerows, a picture of dazzling beauty. She loved the sun, did this woman, and she often urged the sound common sense of the Persians in their worship of it. But to-day, at this hour, she was out of tune with it. To her mind it was the giver of life, and when Death was abroad she could not look at it. She passed into the shade again, and a few steps more brought them to the corridor where her bedroom was. She seemed anxious to reach it, and quickened her pace. Door after door they passed, until they came to one where she stopped suddenly with a cry. Celia was not slow to realize the workings of her mind. It was her brother's room, and only half an hour ago he was there!

Before Celia could stop her Magdalen had turned the handle and entered it. Almost to her horror signs of life were everywhere. The spotless flannels, which the boy had worn for his hot game of tennis with Celia, were sprawling anyhow upon the bed. She felt the waist of the trousers without knowing why, and it was still quite damp to the touch. His soiled collar and tie had been tossed upon the dressing-table. The room reeked of cigarette smoke, a tray upon the writing-table being full of ash, and close by it there was lying upon the blotting-pad a sheet

of notepaper containing Eustace's handwriting. It was an unfinished letter. Magdalen took it up eagerly, and as she read it to herself she uttered a low moan, and covered her face with her hands. Until that moment she had been stunned by the news, and not a tear had fallen, but now, to Celia's relief and her own, she cried bitterly, and through her sobs handed her the unfinished letter to read.

It ran as follows:

"DEAR MAGDA,—I'm sorry for what I said just now. It was my beastly temper. We always seem to be quarrelling, you and I. But before I go off to Germany on Monday let us patch things up. I write this because I'm such a rotter at saying things. It's all been my fault, the whole thing. I wish I was different. I don't want all this money I'm to come into in six months. And upon my soul I don't think it was decent of the Gov'nor to cut you clean out of it. I should like you to have some of it while I'm alive. You deserve it, and would know what to do with it. So when I come back from Hanover we'll get it fixed up somehow. Oh, I wish I wasn't so useless. . . ."

No wonder Magdalen was moved. It was the offer of the olive branch. But it had come too late. It is a way it has.

"I'm glad of that," cried Magdalen bitterly. "Oh, I'm glad of that!"

"There was good in the fellow after all," was Celia's sad, unspoken thought. But of course there was. It may be taken as an axiom that whereas the world is not bored by the existence of a single, consistent saint so it is not encumbered by a single, consistent sinner. It is not such a dull hole as that. If it were, existence would be a heavy business, and human beings of all ages would not be so deadly anxious to remain in it. In Eustace Ede's case it all comes back to this—given a chance, the good in him might have preponderated. And the discovery of this unfinished letter completely changed Magdalen's thoughts. Without it the shock of his untimely death was, of course, very great, and

the circumstances and consequences surrounding it increased its poignancy. But after her recovery from it she never would have played the hypocrite. She was far too genuine and strong a character for that. The opinion of Society could have "gone hang." A decent mourning for an orthodox period she never would have indulged in, because she would not have felt it. She and her brother had never been good friends, and the fact of his death would not have changed her feelings in that respect a single iota. But this one spontaneous action on the boy's part, belated though it was, revolutionized her point of view. It revealed to her something in him that she had not dreamed of. It made her grieve for all the past discord. It made her feel that after all she was something to him. It made her resent the wickedness of his bringing-up. It made her regret most deeply that he had not taken her into his confidence earlier. It made her think that she must have misunderstood him. It made her wonder how much she had been to blame, and whether, if she had been different, he would have been different. It let loose the flood-gates of affection. Furthermore, the manner of the boy's death was horrible to her. It stood out before her. The loneliness of it! The struggle for life which there must have been! The powerless arms clutching at nothing! The cries for help unheeded, unheard! The torture of mind! The agony of despair! The stab of pain at the end! And then engulfed! Drowned! Alone!

"Why was nobody with him? What was every one doing?" she cried violently, as the power over words returned to her. "You were on the croquet lawn at the time, weren't you?"

"Yes," replied Celia with a shudder.

"And you heard no cry?"

"Not a sound, dear. We were laughing and talking over the game."

"And I was in the library with Michael," cried Magdalen.

And she pulled herself up suddenly with a shiver. She knew perfectly well that during those minutes passed with him in utter selfishness, as she insisted to herself, she had been deaf to everything in the world but to the man she

loved. And she was blaming herself now unutterably, though quite unreasonably.

The unfinished letter was shaking in her hand. In a flash she held it out again before her, and with wild, staring eyes read it through a second time, her trembling lips framing the words to herself.

"Celia!" she gasped. "*Why* did he write this letter?"

"What do you mean?" inquired the girl.

"Am I the cause of it—the cause of his death? I went there to-day to kill myself, and failed. Did—Eustace do the same—and succeed?"

"Why think of such a thing?"

"It's in my mind, and I can't get it out," exclaimed Magdalen. "Doesn't this letter suggest it? It does to me, I tell you. Look at what he says. Why should he write it at all?"

Celia took the letter in her hand, and tried her utmost to disabuse Magdalen's mind of this notion.

"But don't you see, Magdalen, his reason for writing it? He gives it, dear. He says: 'I write this because I'm such a rotter at saying things.'"

"Yes," cried Magdalen; "but the rest of it. He suddenly casts all the blame upon himself. 'I wish I was different,' he says. And then the end of it: 'Oh, I wish I wasn't so useless.' Celia, he made up his mind to do this. I'm—I'm convinced of it!"

The tears were streaming down her face, and Celia argued with her strongly.

"You're wrong, Magdalen, indeed you are."

"I would give the world to think I was. The thought that I have been responsible for this is unendurable to me."

Celia changed her tactics completely. She went up to her, and took hold of both her hands firmly. She almost shook them, and a tone of command came into her voice.

"You shan't have that thought," she said. "You've got to drive it out of your mind once and for all—and *now*. This was no deliberate act of Eustace, and if you never speak to me again, I'll tell you why."

Magdalen looked into her eyes inquiringly. She was able

to realize the earnestness of the girl. She wondered what she was going to hear. There was a moment's pause.

"Tell me, then. I would give the world to be convinced," she whispered.

Celia regarded her steadily and said quietly and sadly:

"Poor Eustace would never have had the pluck."

Magdalen was silent, and it was evident that these sensible words impressed her.

"Besides, look at the rest of the letter, dear," continued Celia appealingly, as she pointed to the writing. "This is conclusive surely. He speaks of his journey to Hanover, don't you see? and making things right before he starts on Monday, and of arranging matters with you on his return. If Eustace had meant to do this thing he never would have written like that. There would be no sense in it. Can't you see that I'm right? Ah, do say that you do, Magda?"

"Yes, I suppose you are," she answered weakly.

"But of course I am. Now come to your room, there's a dear thing."

The girl put her arms round her neck and kissed her lovingly.

"Give me back his letter, will you?" whispered Magdalen in a trembling voice. Celia placed the note in her hand, and as Magdalen took it, it brought into her torrent of thoughts the only gleam of comfort she could find — that her inheritance was the wish of her brother. She held the message caressingly in her fingers. Then, conscious of the compelling pressure of her friend's arm around her, she moved slowly to the door, took one last, hasty look at the hushed room, and after some dozen faltering steps reached her own.

Richardson, her maid, having closed the green shutters to ward off the afternoon sun, was there anxiously awaiting her arrival.

She was a woman of middle age, and had been in Magdalen's service since her marriage, four years ago. While typical of her class, she was an excellent servant, exhibiting her grief over the tribulation of her mistress with characteristic indiscriminateness.

When the little boy, Philip, died, to whom she was passionately devoted, her sorrow was uncontrollable, and now the tragic end of Eustace, whom she cordially detested, affected her in equal proportions. She was bathed in tears in the doorway.

But Magdalen did not want anyone near her except her friend. The thought of being stared at was intolerable to her, and Richardson, to her infinite disappointment, was dismissed tactfully by Celia. For fully ten minutes, however, she stood uncommonly near the keyhole, but the key not being turned horizontally in the lock, no view of the room was obtainable, and since Magdalen was lying in silent meditation upon the sofa, and Celia also was not speaking, she was completely balked of any satisfaction.

Her only remaining hope, therefore, as she retired dejectedly, was that "that interfering Mrs. Gurney" would be asked to ring for her. Meanwhile, in a state of snuffling indecision as to whether she should visit her own apartment or the servants' hall, she finally resolved upon the latter locality, where she found Rate steadying himself with a glass of port and a biscuit.

"Join me in a glass, Miss Richardson?" he asked painfully.

"Thank you, Mr. Rate. I *should* like a drop of something. I've got such a vacancy inside me."

"Vacuum, Miss Richardson," was the butler's doleful correction, as he hospitably poured out his master's wine.

CHAPTER X

DIRECTLY the library closed upon Magdalen and Celia Ware wiped his forehead in relief. Not a word was spoken for some time. Although he was gradually recovering his self-control, it was plain to the other men in the room that he was severely shaken, and Michael Adye mixed some whisky and soda-water in a tumbler, which he took to him. Ware drank it off at a gulp and warmly pressed Adye's hand as he looked up into the powerful face.

There was a pleading expression in Ware's eyes, which the K.C. understood. They were asking him to blot out from his memory, if he could, his knowledge of the transfer transaction. They were all witnesses of a ghastly tragedy, and shared in a common sorrow. Let that, then, remove all other thoughts.

"Thanks, my dear fellow," whispered Ware gratefully, as he handed back the glass to him. He then raised his voice to Egerton, who had turned his back upon a painful scene. "I'm afraid you'll think me rather a weakling," he continued, "but having to come in and break this awful news to my wife fairly finished me."

"Naturally," said Egerton sympathetically, placing a hand upon his shoulder.

"But I'm all right now." And Ware stood up, his strength returning to him.

"What's—what's the first thing to be done?" he asked helplessly.

"Dr. Seddleton will be here to attend to Lady Ware as soon as possible," interposed Gurney. "He's out for the moment, but they expect to get him on the telephone."

"Thanks, Marston."

"Ware," began Egerton quietly, "is the poor fellow in the bathing-shed or —?"

"No, there — there isn't a trace of him," answered Ware with emotion.

"Then you'd better let me ring up the Police Station at once. You're in the Metropolitan Police area here, and I could get them over with as little delay as possible."

"It's very good of you, Egerton. I wish you would," said Ware. "And Marston — will you, like a good fellow, bring Durnwell to us. He will be able to tell us everything there is to be told."

Gurney left the room to carry out this request, while Egerton through the telephone spoke to the local Police Station.

"Is that Inspector Watkin?" he asked quietly. "Good. It's Sir Henry Egerton speaking — yes, Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department. I'm at Sir Hubert Ware's house — Wilbury, yes. An accident has just occurred here. Sir Hubert's brother-in-law has been drowned in the lake. — No, there's no trace of the body. — Yes, Sir Hubert would like you to come immediately. — Yes, of course, bring everything necessary with you — yes, there are boats here. Come at once then, with your men. Good-bye."

Egerton hung up the receiver, and turned to Ware and Adye, who had remained motionless during the message.

"They'll be here as soon as possible to drag the lake," he explained.

"Horrible," said Ware with a shudder. "But there ought not to be any great difficulty in — in recovering him. He — he can't possibly have been far out."

"A very weak swimmer, wasn't he?" asked Egerton.

"Very," replied Ware. "That's just the worst of it. We ought never to have allowed him to go alone."

"And then, no doubt, he'd got very hot playing tennis," suggested Adye, "and possibly cramp or —"

"Probably," whispered Ware.

They were interrupted by Gurney, who came into the room with Durnwell, the under-gardener. The latter stood still, and, while giving the very meagre information that he was able to furnish, turned his straw hat round and round in his fingers.

"Tell us everything you know, Durnwell," said Ware.

"Well, Sir 'Ubert, I knows very little, very little indeed. But what I knows, Sir 'Ubert, I tells — and what I sees, Sir 'Ubert."

He added the last few words with considerable emphasis, which caused Ware to look at him quickly.

"Did you see Mr. Eustace in the water, then?" he asked.

"No, Sir 'Ubert, that's what I doesn't see, Sir 'Ubert."

"Did you hear him cry out for help?" inquired Egerton.

"No, sir, that's where it come in. I weren't there then, sir. I 'as my barrow on the pathway below this 'ere terrace, and I be busy with them weeds."

"But from there you might have heard Mr. Eustace if he cried out," interrupted Ware.

"Yes, Sir 'Ubert, very like, Sir 'Ubert, but I weren't there then when 'e be in the water, Sir 'Ubert. Yer see, Sir 'Ubert, I 'as my barrow on the pathway below this 'ere terrace —"

"You've already told us that," said Adye, who might have been addressing a witness impatiently.

"But not then, Sir 'Ubert; at that time I be busy with them weeds, Sir 'Ubert."

There was a look of despair on the faces of the four listeners, which, however, produced no effect upon the under-gardener, who continued determinedly:

"But weeds, Sir 'Ubert, doesn't grow all in the same place, Sir 'Ubert. So I wheels my barrow along, I does, Sir, 'Ubert, away to the east lawn. But *before* I wheels 'er along, Sir 'Ubert, I be busy with them weeds — but on the pathway to the west below this 'ere terrace, Sir 'Ubert."

"I understand that," said Ware with a sigh.

"Well, Sir 'Ubert, there upon the pathway below this 'ere terrace, Sir 'Ubert, I sees Mr. Eustace, I does."

The four listeners were again interested.

"And I can see 'im now, Sir 'Ubert, as plain as day. I be busy with them weeds at the time, Sir 'Ubert, and Mr. Eustace passes me. 'E wears a light grey soot, Sir 'Ubert, with a towel round his neck, Sir 'Ubert. I says to myself, I says, 'Mr. Eustace be going to bathe.' I 'ad no doubt

about it, Sir 'Ubert. With the towel round 'is neck it was as plain as plain can be, Sir 'Ubert."

"And then?" inquired Ware.

"I be busy with them weeds again, Sir 'Ubert. It seemed so natural like I didn't think any more of it, Sir 'Ubert, 'ot day and everything. So I went on, being busy with them weeds. Well then, Sir 'Ubert, I'd just got up a tidy lot, and my back ached a bit, so I stopped, Sir 'Ubert, and just looked about me like. Then I sees Mr. Eustace a-sittin' on the seat lower down under the laburnums. 'E was a-smokin', Sir 'Ubert. And then I says to myself, 'e don't seem very anxious to go in, I says. But then that didn't strike me overmuch at the time, Sir 'Ubert, but I sees 'im as plain as day."

"Yes?"

"Well then, Sir 'Ubert, just at that part there be no more weeds to be busy with."

"That's a comfort," muttered Egerton to Adye.

"So I 'ups with my barrow away to the east lawn I does, Sir 'Ubert,—just below the croquet where you was playin', sir, with Mister er Misses Gurney," he added to Egerton. "And there I stays for some time, Sir 'Ubert."

"Right in the other direction away from the lake," said Ware.

"That's correct, Sir 'Ubert. And from there I sees no more of the poor young gentleman, Sir 'Ubert. I sees and 'ears nothin' of anybody except the croquet balls up above me. And them I doesn't pay much attention to, Sir 'Ubert. I be busy with them weeds at the time —"

"But you went down to the shed, I understood," interrupted Ware.

"That be later, Sir 'Ubert, and it 'appened in this way, Sir 'Ubert, if I may explain."

"Yes, yes, go on."

"Well, Sir 'Ubert, I be busy with them weeds on that 'ere east lawn. And time flies some'ow when you be busy with weeds."

"Does it?" groaned Adye to Egerton.

"Well, Sir 'Ubert, at last when I could find no more weeds

to be busy on, I says to myself, I says, 'I'll put them weeds on the rubbish 'eap, which be near the bathing shed,' that's what I says. So I wheels my barrow back, Sir 'Ubert, from the east lawn till I reaches the pathway to the west again."

"Where you had first seen Mr. Eustace?" said Ware.

"That's right, Sir 'Ubert. There I finds one or two more weeds to be busy on. Them weeds escapes us sometimes, they do, Sir 'Ubert. Well, when I gets them weeds up I looks around me again, and I notices the seat lower down under the laburnums empty. *That*, Sir 'Ubert, meant that Mr. Eustace 'ad gone," he said mysteriously, "but 'ow 'e'd gone and when 'e'd gone I doesn't say, Sir 'Ubert. But it didn't strike me at the time. Well, I puts my weeds in my barrow, and wheels 'er by degrees down to the rubbish 'eap by the water."

"And you reached it?" said Adye tersely.

"Oh, I reached it right enough, sir."

"Altogether, then, from the time you first saw Mr. Eustace on the pathway to the time you reached the bathing-shed twenty minutes to half an hour may have passed?" inquired Ware.

"Quite, Sir 'Ubert, I should say. Them weeds take time, Sir 'Ubert."

"Well?"

"Well, when I reaches the shed with my weeds—"

"Yes, never mind the weeds now. They're all up, you know," said Adye impatiently.

They had at length reached the point of the narrative, and the experienced King's Counsel was not for letting it slip.

"What did you do then?" he asked.

Durnwell continued to consider that the catastrophe concerned Ware more than it did Adye, and addressed his master solely.

"Well, Sir 'Ubert, I knows some time 'ad passed, and I sees no one in the water. Then I says to myself, I says, the young gentleman must 'ave finished and gorn back to the 'ouse, specially when I notices the door of the shed weren't fastened. That's what I says to myself, Sir 'Ubert." He paused for a moment and lowered his voice almost to a

whisper: "Then I just opens the door wider, I does, Sir 'Ubert, and I sees *what* I sees. The poor young gentleman's grey soot, which 'e be a-wearing on the pathway when I be busy with them weeds, were 'angin' on a peg in the shed. 'Is towel be on the table; but 'is bathing dress, what I forgot to say 'e 'ad under 'is arm when I be busy with them weeds, was gorn."

The four listeners remained quite still, and Ware, sitting forward in his chair and gazing fixedly in front of him, closed his eyes in pain.

"And — and then?" he queried feebly.

"Then, Sir 'Ubert," continued Durnwell in a hushed tone, "I goes right into the shed, I does, and looks about. Not a thing was a-stirrin', Sir 'Ubert. There be the grey soot a 'angin' on the peg, and what's more, Sir 'Ubert, there be the young gentleman's under garmin'ts, 'is shirt an' vest an' cotton pants, on the chair close by, an' 'is watch an' chain on the table by 'is towel, Sir 'Ubert. Then I says to myself, I says — p'r'aps hafter hall, 'e be on the platform on the water side of the shed by the steps just 'avin' a look at it, so to speak, so I goes through to see, I does, Sir 'Ubert. But there be no one there surely, Sir 'Ubert, and no one in the water. It was like hile. Then I looks at the boats and the punt, thinkin', Sir 'Ubert, p'r'aps 'e be gorn for a row. But they be there, all three of 'em. I sees 'em as clear as day, I does."

"Did you leave everything in the shed as you found it?" asked Egerton.

"Never touched nothin', Sir 'Ubert."

"And then you came to the house to give the alarm," said Adye, putting the shutter on the story.

"Not just at once, Sir 'Ubert," proceeded Durnwell, who consistently addressed all answers to his master. "Not just at once. I comes out of the shed again, I does, Sir 'Ubert, and there I sees my barrow full of them weeds I was a-goin' to chuck on the rubbish 'eap."

"Oh, lord!" murmured Adye once more to Egerton.

"And then I says to myself, I says: 'Them weeds must wait.' So I takes my barrow, I does, Sir 'Ubert, and pushes

'er to the side — that be to the left side of the shed, leavin' them weeds in 'er and —"

"Yes, yes," ejaculated Ware, as he rose to his feet and paced the room restlessly.

"And you walked with your news to the house," interposed Gurney.

"Beggin' your pardon, Sir 'Ubert, and to make a long story short, so to speak, there be no walking for me then, Sir 'Ubert. I ran to the 'ouse, I did."

Egerton, of course, was in his element in an accident of this nature, and may be pardoned for introducing a somewhat professional attitude.

"I think, Ware, if you don't mind," he suggested, "I'll go down to the shed with Durnwell."

"Of course," answered Ware, as he continued to pace the room.

"Yes, Sir 'Enery," was the gardener's eager reply. "And I can show yer heverythin', Sir 'Enery. We could go over the 'ole course, we could. I could fust pint out that 'ere pathway where I be busy with them weeds, and —"

"No, straight to the shed, please," interrupted Egerton promptly.

"I'll come with you," said Ware, with an effort. "You, too, Adye, if you will, and Marston. I'm a bit shaky, and I'd — I'd rather have every one round me just now. You understand."

He poured some more whisky and soda into a tumbler, and drank it off. Gurney was by his side, watching him sympathetically. He held out his hand silently to Ware, who grasped it weakly.

"Your hand's as cold as ice," said Gurney feelingly.

"Yes, it's horribe this — horrible."

"Don't you think you'd better stay quietly here, Sir Hubert?"

"No — no. I'd rather come with you all."

"Celia's looking after Lady Ware."

"Thanks, yes, I know."

"And I don't suppose the doctor will be very long now," added Gurney.

Ware turned towards the window with his secretary, and picked up his hat from the table.

"We'll lead the way," he said in a low tone to Adye and Egerton.

All four then passed out slowly through the door-window to the terrace, followed by Durnwell, and, taking their movements from Ware, hesitated momentarily under the scorching afternoon sun as they surveyed a beautiful scene.

Each of the five men was silent. Each of the five men was thinking. If their thoughts could have been written down then and there, it would have been ascertained that the majority favoured a mental contrast between what was and what had been but half an hour ago. A gruesome tragedy had been enacted. A strange stillness was in the air. Death lurked in every corner of the ground. And the day laughed.

Taking a long breath, Ware passed his arm through Gurney's, and proceeded to the left slowly. Adye and Egerton followed them in silence, and Durnwell brought up the rear. He was the only one of the five who allowed his gaze to wander. In passing the west wing of the old Elizabethan house his eyes rested upon a window in the servants' quarters, wherein a crowd of very excited and very inquisitive faces was watching breathlessly the small and mournful procession. Decidedly, it was a moment of considerable importance to Durnwell. It was a unique episode in his life. Certainly none of the indoor servants had ever undergone so prominent an experience; and when he thus saw his intimates he bestowed upon them no look of recognition whatsoever. On the contrary, he appeared to ignore their existence, while at the same time he perceived the chance of a demonstration of his superiority. Accordingly, in full view of the Wilbury household, he hurried past Egerton and Adye, and was quickly by Ware's side.

"If you'll come down them steps, Sir 'Ubert," he suggested, "I be able to show you where I fust sees Mr. Eustace, Sir 'Ubert."

Ware allowed him to pass, and as Durnwell descended a flight of old paved steps, followed by the other four, he

stood out, he felt confident, in the eyes of Rate and his footmen, of the *chef* and his kitchen-maids, of the kitchen-maids and their scullery-maids, of the upper-housemaids and their under-housemaids, as the unquestioned leader of the expedition. It was a short-lived glory for him, since he was quickly below the line of vision from the window. But it had its glamour while it lasted. He then pointed to the garden-seat on the lower level, while the others stood still.

"There be the seat, Sir 'Ubert, what I spoke of. It be there I fust sees 'im, Sir 'Ubert," he began, as he proceeded to indicate the path. "And it be this 'ere pathway where you gentlemen be all a-standin' where I be busy with them weeds. If yer looks close, Sir 'Ubert, yer'll see some of the 'oles they made. There be a tidy lot of them weeds, Sir 'Ubert, and —"

"Yes, yes," interposed Egerton, who pointed towards the right, "and then you went, as you told us, to the east lawn."

"There's nothing there for us to see," said Ware quietly.

Durnwell was a trifle disappointed at the interruption, and fell silently behind Egerton and Adye, who followed Ware and Gurney in the direction of the lake.

Sir Hubert and Marston Gurney did not exchange a word; but Michael Adye spoke his thoughts to Sir Henry.

"Extraordinary what half an hour can do," he said. "Just now when the poor fellow came into the library there seemed as much chance of Lady Ware inheriting that fortune as —"

"And how money goes to money, by Jove!" sighed Egerton.

But he did not know what Adye knew, and the K.C. did not deceive him. Ware halted outside the bathing-shed and waited for the others. They all hesitated by the closed door, and Durnwell saw a further opportunity for explaining details. He came forward quickly and spoke in a hushed tone.

"I shut the door, Sir 'Ubert, before I runs up to the 'ouse with the news, Sir 'Ubert. Shall I open it, Sir 'Ubert?"

After a moment's pause, during which each face wore a

strained look, Ware nodded assent; and Durnwell, opening the door slowly, entered the bathing-shed. He stood facing them with his back to the open side and the water beyond.

"If you'll come in, gentlemen," he continued in a half whisper, "you'll find I tells yer everythin' correct."

There was a general indication from the others that they wished Ware to pass in first, and after a very natural hesitation he acquiesced.

Adye closed the door, and there fell upon the little party of serious-faced men that painful silence which haunts a chamber of death. The stillness in the air, too, was awful. The trees outside were motionless—as motionless as stage trees in a stage storm, which is saying a good deal. The water was glassy; it stared. It would have beaten any painter. All the birds were dumb, and the insects seemed lulled to sleep. Amid the quiet the five men stood stock-still, and slowly the eyes of each became riveted upon one object, which lay upon the small table. It made itself felt. In the silence round about, it was the only thing that appeared to live. It was Eustace Ede's watch. It ticked very loudly.

"That be Mr. Eustace's, ain't it, Sir 'Ubert?" said Durnwell.

"Yes," was Ware's whispered answer as he bit his lip.

"And them 'is clothes, Sir 'Ubert?" continued the gardener, pointing to the grey suit.

"Yes, yes," replied Ware, raising his voice. "It's all true enough. I'll go back to the house now. It's horrible, this."

He passed out of the door and closed it after him.

CHAPTER XI

EGERTON was glad when Ware left them. In the absence of the master he found it easier to question Durnwell, and to keep him closely to the point.

"Show us, please, exactly where Mr. Eustace used to enter the water."

Durnwell went out upon the platform, followed by the others, and pointed to the wooden steps which descended from it. Egerton's demeanour was somewhat peremptory and business-like, and the gardener was quickly reduced to short answers. The weeds were effectually killed.

"Just 'ere, Sir 'Enery."

"Would he be in his depth there?"

"Oh, yes, Sir 'Enery, by them steps."

"And a few yards out?"

"It be eight or ten foot deep very quick, Sir 'Enery."

"What's the bottom like?"

"Well, Sir 'Enery, there be a tidy lot of mud and a tidy lot of weeds."

"I see," said Egerton very quickly on hearing the familiar word.

"They grow thick, they does, them weeds, Sir 'Enery, and —"

"Yes, yes, that's all I want to know."

Prompt silence from Durnwell.

Egerton, Adye and Gurney stood upon the little landing-stage under the sun, staring at the smooth water. Each of the three was picturing the lifeless body of the boy, who but a few minutes since was of their party in the house, lying alone beneath the peaceful, unruffled surface, when, attracted by the sound of voices close by, they caught sight of a party of men walking towards the bathing-shed.

"Ah, there's Inspector Watkin with his men. He's been quick," said Egerton.

Durnwell, foreseeing further inquiry and the opportunity

for further explanation, hastened through the shed to conduct the police party to the scene. He returned quickly with Detective-Inspector Watkin, two other men also in plain clothes who carried ropes with ghastly-looking hooks attached, a third man who was obviously a gentleman, and Rate, who, seeing a chance of being "in it," had caused himself the unusual inconvenience of personally conducting people, who, in his own estimation, were distinctly inferior in station, to the place of the accident.

The detective-inspector was typical of his calling. However he had been dressed he could have passed as nothing else in this world. His plain clothes certainly did not disguise him. He was a veritable danger-signal to every black-guard about. He stood at the salute and greeted Egerton in a tremendously throaty and stentorian tone: "Good afternoon, Sir Henry. This is Dr. Winter, Divisional Police Surgeon."

The inspector had indicated the man of gentlemanly appearance, who held in his hand the inevitable doctor's bag.

"How are you, Dr. Winter?" said Egerton. "This is a sad job."

"Terrible," replied the middle-aged doctor. "I've — er — I've brought everything with me in the event of life not yet being extinct," he added, holding up his bag.

"No chance of that, I fear," answered Egerton. "The accident occurred some forty-five minutes ago, and there's no trace of the body."

"You needn't wait, Rate," said Gurney, who had observed the butler's eye revolving round the bathing-shed and stamping every detail upon his memory.

"Oh, very well, sir," was the sad reply. And Rate retreated dejectedly to the house, greatly to the pleasure of Durnwell, whose sole services were required.

Egerton quickly recounted the details of the tragedy to the inspector, who duly inscribed them in his pocket-book.

"Yes, Sir 'Enery," broke in Durnwell, "but yer be leavin' out 'ow it was me what fust came to see the young gentleman, and 'ow I be busy with them weeds at the time, and —"

"Your weeds," said Egerton sharply, "have played a prominent part in your story, but they have nothing to do with the accident."

"Only answer the questions put to you. Understand?" was Inspector Watkin's noisy command.

Durnwell was sat upon, and became silent.

"Is that the young gentleman's watch?" inquired the inspector, pointing to the table.

"I've already said that, and I don't want to repeat myself," answered Durnwell sulkily, with a "put that in your pipe and smoke it" nod of his head.

The inspector took up the watch and chain, and opened the sovereign-purse at its other end. He then proceeded to count the three sovereigns which it contained, put them back, and made a note in his pocket-book. He then pointed to the grey flannel suit, the white hat, the underclothing and the shoes, and eyed the gardener.

"Those the things he'd been wearing?"

"I've already said that, and I don't want to repeat myself," replied Durnwell in the same tone.

The inspector felt in the pockets, and extracted a cigarette case and holder, a match box, a pencil, fourteen shillings in silver, and three pennies. He placed them all by the watch on the table, again took up his pocket-book and elaborated his note, concluding the operation with the words, "fourteen shillings in silver and threepence in bronze."

"Is that his towel?" he then asked of Durnwell.

"I've already said that, and I don't want to repeat myself."

Adye and Gurney exchanged glances, and even in the circumstances failed to suppress a smile.

The inspector stepped out upon the landing-stage with Egerton.

"Is this where he went in, sir?"

"I've already —"

"Yes, but Inspector Watkin was addressing me, Durnwell," broke in Egerton, so quickly that the gardener had no chance. "Yes, this is the spot," he replied to the inspector.

He further told him the depth of the water and the other details which Durnwell had furnished.

Egerton then agreed with the inspector that the two men with the rope had better begin the gruesome task of dragging for the body. Accordingly they passed through the shed to the grass bank, and from the two boats and the punt the men selected the latter as being, they thought, the most handy for the operation. It either could be propelled by a pole or by a small pair of sculls with adjustable rowlocks. It was lying alongside the boats farthest from the shed.

While the two men with the rope and hooks were contemplating the craft, and in turn scratched their heads in the process, the rest of the party watched them silently.

"Are they just going to begin, Marston?" inquired a hushed voice of Gurney.

It was Sir Hubert Ware, who naturally more restless than the others, had been unable to remain in the house alone.

"Yes, Sir Hubert," replied Gurney. "How is Lady Ware?"

"I haven't seen her. She's still in her room with your wife," was the quiet answer.

The two men were now in the punt, the one in the middle with the sculls, the other in the stern arranging the rope with its hooks between his knees. Durnwell bent down upon the bank to set the chain free, and stepped back suddenly with a grunt of surprise.

"What's the matter?" asked the inspector as loudly as if he had been addressing a squad of prisoners.

"Why, this 'ere chain," replied Durnwell. "It ain't fastened!"

"Well, why should it be?"

"Becos it be my business to see that all them boats is fastened, Mister Inspector. And two hours since or less they was."

"Yes, but about an hour ago I bathed from the punt," said Gurney.

"And did yer fasten 'er up afterwards, sir?" asked Durnwell.

"I'm certain I did — to the stake there. I remember doing it."

"Then someone came since and undo 'er; that be my pint, Mister Inspector. I knows what I knows, I does."

Inspector Watkin turned to Ware:

"Perhaps the young gentleman took the punt himself and bathed from it, Sir 'Ubert?"

"Very unlikely," answered Ware seriously. "I believe he always went in from the steps."

"Invariably," interrupted Gurney.

"Still, it's possible he might have done it this once, sir," continued the inspector.

Durnwell had taken a great dislike to Inspector Watkin, and smiled rather contemptuously at him.

"Beggin' yer pardon, Mister Inspector," he said, "I doesn't see 'ow it's possible." He knocked one fist upon the other as he proceeded to make his point. "I be the only one what sees 'im, ain't I? And 'e bathes alone, don't 'e? Well, what I means, gentlemen, is this 'ere"; and he proceeded to address the entire party: "If 'e takes that 'ere punt alone and bathes alone, and gets drowned alone, 'ow, and this be what I puts to the inspector perticler, 'ow, I asks, could 'e 'ave put back that 'ere punt in 'er proper place after gettin' drowned?"

Inspector Watkin glared at him, and his black moustache looked decidedly blacker than usual.

Ware and Gurney remained silent, but Egerton turned to Adye.

"The man's right, by Jove!" he said. "Er — Ware, how many other gardeners have you? One of them might have been here and left the punt unfastened."

"Four," answered Ware.

"And I can tell where they all was, Sir 'Ubert," volunteered Durnwell.

"There be M'Pherson, the 'ead gardener. He be gone to Aberdeen to bury 'is aunt. So 'e don't count. Then there be Paterson, what lives over there," and he pointed to the far end of the lake. "Paterson be gone 'ome to 'is wife some 'arf hour afore. 'E 'ad leave from 'er lady-

ship. 'Is wife 'ad a babby last night. That made 'is ninth."

"Never mind the babies, Durnwell," said Egerton.

"I never does, Sir 'Enery; I leaves that to the missus. Then there be Rickworth. 'E be gorn 'ome too. 'Is wife 'ad 'ad a babby as well, but not the same night. Oh, no, sir. That be the night afore that. It be a race between 'em, Sir 'Ubert, and she won. It be 'er sixth, Sir 'Ubert. Oh, it be a wonderful part of the country this for babbies. They comes up year after year just like my lilies, they does."

"And the fourth man?" asked Egerton. "Had he had a baby too?"

"Branch!" laughed Durnwell. "Branch ain't married, sir; 'e 'as no babbies as far as we knows of. No, sir; Branch be in the kitchen garden all the time. 'E be there now, Sir 'Ubert. 'E ain't moved."

"And you, then," continued Egerton, "are the only remaining hand who could have unchained that punt after Mr. Gurney had fastened it up?"

"But, sir, I does nothin' of the sort."

"I know, I know."

"Why, as I tells, I be busy with them weeds at the time."

"That's enough, thank you," said Egerton abruptly, and any further irrelevancies were stopped.

At a signal from the inspector the men pushed off in the punt.

The man in the middle sculled slowly, and the man in the stern dropped his grim-looking hooks into the water. Those on the bank watched them without speaking and stood very still. It was a quest unlike any that they had taken part in before, and in spite of the nearness of it all to Ware and Gurney, and — shall we say? Adye, it had its own strange fascination to every pair of eyes which looked out. All were silent, and the only sound which reached them was the groan of the sculls in the rowlocks and the gentle splash of the blades, as they disturbed the sheet of glassy water which seemed to laugh hypocritically in the sun while it hid so much from sight. Why they all stayed it would be difficult to explain. But they seemed riveted to the spot.

Morbidly seized hold of them, and the weirdness of it all attracted them strangely.

The punt drew away from them until it was abreast of the bathing-shed steps. Then a commanding wave of the arm from Inspector Watkin directed the men to go further out. They complied with the order, and the inspector marched heavily through the shed to the little landing-stage. The rest of the party followed him mechanically.

On the way, his arm linked in Ware's, Egerton said to him:

"Curious that about the punt-chain. I wonder who could have unfastened it."

"I can't imagine," answered Ware. "Perhaps, Marston," and he turned to Gurney, "you didn't chain it securely?"

"Oh, yes, Sir Hubert, I did," was the answer, "I remember securing it firmly to the stake. It couldn't possibly have come undone. There's only one explanation that I can think of."

"What's that?" asked Ware.

"Why, that Eustace did think of bathing from the punt, unchained it, and then altered his mind, forgetting to fasten it up again."

"Of course, that's probably the explanation of it, don't you think, Egerton?" said Ware.

"A very good one. I should think it was," agreed Egerton.

"I don't see how there can be any other," interposed Adye.

Once again they all silently watched the search-punt, which was now in deep water, being rowed slowly backwards and forwards, the man in the stern with the rope now standing up and now sitting down. The punt was doing its work well. It was crossing methodically a fair-sized area of water, but as yet no sign came from the men. They were sufficiently near for any remark that passed between them to be carried by the water to the party on the landing-stage. For another fifteen or twenty minutes the monotonous process lasted, the quest appearing fruitless, the lake refus-

ing to give up its dead, when suddenly a quick voice from the stern was audible, which caused every man on the landing-stage to hold his breath.

"Hold on, Jim, a moment," it said.

The man with the sculls stopped immediately, and the speaker stood up and involuntarily bent over the rope. It pulled him forward strongly, and it was plain to those upon the landing-stage that it was tauter than before. Each one craned his neck forward to see more clearly.

"Keep 'er still," continued the voice, which had a distinctly excited tone in it. "I've got it!"

Then with one hand the man signalled explicitly to the onlookers, while with the other he hung on grimly to his "catch." His companion joined him in the stern, and together they pulled the rope with difficulty into the punt.

"Keep the pull steady, Jim. It's fast in the weeds. That's the way—that's it!" A few inches more of the rope came up into the punt, and the two men, with bent backs, tugged in unison.

"Hup!—hup!—hup!" they cried together at every heave.

"Not much more, Jim; once get it clear of the weeds, and we shall see it."

"Half a 'mo, Jack," was the breathless answer. And with the sweat streaming down them they rested a few seconds under the scorching sun. The eyes of every man by the steps were glued upon that strained rope, and the face of each was paler than before. With those most intimately concerned, imagination ran riot. What tale of suffering would the face reveal? Could they bear to look upon it? And yet they stayed: they knew not why.

The two men renewed their hideous task. To Ware and Gurney it seemed interminable.

"How much more of this?" groaned Ware. And Eger-ton took his arm.

Silence again for a few more seconds, and then a sharp cry from the punt:

"See, there it is! Steady now!"

It! They were referring to Eustace Ede.

In another moment the party on the landing-stage clearly saw something rise helplessly to the surface, and three of the number looked away while the body was lifted carefully into the punt. They were Ware, Gurney, and Adye.

"I — I feel absolutely sick. I think I'll go in," said Gurney.

"I'll come with you," whispered Ware.

Michael Adye joined them in silence, and all three of them, without the exchange of a word on the way, walked slowly up to the house.

CHAPTER XII

AS they entered the hall they encountered Dr. Seddleton coming down the stairs. He had answered Marston Gurney's telephone message promptly, and had just left Lady Ware. He was a man in the fifties, sandy-haired, pink-complexioned, long-nosed, long-bodied, short-legged and spectacled, with a remarkably non-committal method of expressing himself. He was, in fact, a typical country general practitioner whom you read of in novels or see on the stage. Ware waited for him, and the short legs hastened down the last few steps.

As many people do when they want to condole with you, he merely assumed an ultra-funereal expression, hanging his head upon one side, closing his eyes, and extending his hand without uttering a syllable. He remained in this strictly conventional attitude for the space of some seconds, when Ware released his grasp. He then put on his panama in silence, walked towards the front door, and would have left the house without saying a word if Ware had not put a natural question: "How is my wife?"

"Distressed—very distressed, Sir Hubert."

Adye and Gurney wore a blank expression. It did not need a medical man to tell them that.

"Of course the mental shock—" mildly suggested Gurney.

"Mental shock is an expression that I might use and yet that I might not," replied the doctor. "It is, I consider, a nervous condition Lady Ware is suffering from. I am sending her a mixture which I hope will calm her."

"I trust there's no cause for anxiety?" inquired Adye.

"There might be and there might not be," answered Dr. Seddleton. "I shall look in in the morning to see how she is."

"If she could only get a fair night," said Ware.

"Precisely, Sir Hubert. Sleep is what she needs. This mixture I am giving her may produce it or it may not."

Once more did he hang his head upon one side, close his eyes and silently hold Ware's hand. Then his long body and short legs disappeared through the hall-door and he was gone.

Ware walked into the library, leaving the other two in the hall.

Gurney looked at Adye.

"Takes rather a serious view of Lady Ware, Seddleton, don't you think?"

"No," said Adye emphatically. "He doesn't know anything about her. My dear fellow, there are precious few doctors who know anything about any of us. But I can tell you that there's no need to be anxious about Lady Ware. She'll feel this acutely, but she's very strong and fine."

They were on the point of following Ware, when a voice called in a whisper from the gallery above: "Marston!"

It was Celia. And Gurney ran up to her to answer her natural questions, and to ask after her patient, while Adye joined Ware in the library, and found him mixing a whisky and soda.

It was the first time the two men had been alone together since the painful "transfer" episode. Neither felt at his ease. Ware had attempted a detestable fraud which Adye had discovered.

During a long pause Ware drank off his whisky and soda, and looked across at the K.C., who was sitting thoughtfully by the writing-table.

"Won't you have something?" he asked at last with some diffidence.

"No thanks," replied Adye very quietly, without looking round.

"I — wish you would."

There was no answer from the other, and Ware walked slowly to his side,

"Adye," he said earnestly, "I want you if you will to wipe out from your mind that cursed money document."

"I—" and the K.C. was at a loss what to say.

"I know it's difficult. It must be. It was so damnably mean that if I'd been in my right mind I never should have thought of it. But I was mad, I tell you. I was desperate. Forget it, will you?"

"I'd rather not talk of that again. Let us drop it, Ware."

Adye extracted the paper from his pocket, having forgotten its whereabouts until now, and rose from his chair. He walked to the table near the fireplace, and struck a match, with which he set fire to the miserable thing. The two men watched it burn right through in silence. Then Adye dropped the charred result into the big grate and scrunched it into fragments with his heel.

"There! It's safe now, finished, done with," he said under his breath, without looking round at its author.

"But the recollection of it, Adye? The recollection? If only you'd remove that!"

"We have other things to occupy us now."

There was a quiet, determined finality in Michael Adye's tone, and it was manifest to Ware that it would be useless to revert to the subject. He seated himself resignedly upon the Adams sofa, but not in his usual careless, recumbent attitude. He sat forward with his legs crossed, and he held his top knee in his hands while one thumb-nail picked at the other continuously. Adye, who was sitting upon the other side of the room, not far from the fireplace, could see that he was shaken by the awful catastrophe, though, battle with the temptation as he might, he was unable to check himself from speculating upon the real sensation in Ware's mind. There in that room but an hour ago the man was in such dire financial straits that he would actually have defrauded his own wife of a comparatively small sum, a shameful bankruptcy stared him in the face, and upon Magdalen's own testimony he was to remain under the same roof with her for his support. But now at the very last moment Fate had ordained that his brother-in-law, Eustace Ede, should jump into the water to save him at the cost of his own life.

Incontestably, Ware could have had little in common with the boy, mused Adye; he could have entertained but a meagre affection for him, if any; so that there could be no question of his suffering any lasting, poignant grief.

There was, of course, the first shock to be got over, the momentary horror surrounding the manner of the death, but with Ware's hitherto conspicuous buoyancy all that would pass speedily enough, Adye felt confident. Indeed, if he knew anything of human nature, and precious few understood it better, he would, before the world was many days older, entertain a feeling of considerable relief. This was Michael Adye's irresistible conclusion. He felt equally sure of Magdalen's actions when time permitted. The inheritance was hers absolutely, she could deal with it as she chose. And, of course, with a nature such as she possessed it would be a question of give, give, give to the uttermost farthing. But would she remember her promise to him? — never to undertake any financial transaction before consulting him. He prayed with all the fervour in him that she might. If she did not —! But such a thing was unthinkable, and Adye resolved at a fitting opportunity to remind her of it.

As for the K.C. himself, he was only a human being, and this ghastly tragedy which had befallen the house had to his mind its compensations and its other side. What has not? When not engaged in his work he had but one absorbing thought — the woman he loved, the woman he revered; and the untimely death of the boy gave life to her. At any rate it saved her from a mere existence. Her place in the world, over which she reigned, was secure again. She was spared the misery and the want which another had reduced her to. But how quickly had the change been wrought? Why, it was only just now that he was inveighing against her father's will and the injustice of it, from the very spot where he now sat! The big clock which at this moment, during the silence of these two men with their two minds working in their own respective ways, ticked loudly as it jerked its minute-hand forward. It had only made one complete circle since Adye was standing by Magdalen's side and fighting with himself

not to tell her all, while with scarcely the utterance of a word he revealed everything.

The bare truth was plain. Eustace Ede's life had been a nuisance, but his death was a master-stroke. If only he could be conscious of it! Perhaps he was. We cannot be sure. We only can be sure of one thing: he will keep it all religiously to himself.

The silence between the two had lasted for some time, and each of them remained in the same position, Adye looking at Ware from time to time as his thoughts ran on, Ware not heeding him, and, with his eyes fixed upon one spot of the carpet, still picking at his thumb-nail, when the door opened, and Marston Gurney came into the room quietly.

"Sir Hubert," he said in a low voice.

Ware awoke from his reverie nervously.

"They're bringing — Eustace to the house. Shall I tell them to bring him here?"

Ware looked rather helplessly at Adye as if to ask for advice.

"I should say so," said the K.C. in a hushed tone as he approached Gurney. "Upstairs Lady Ware would be rather close to it all, wouldn't she? And then for the inquest it would be more convenient, I think." Ware winced at the hateful word, and rose from the sofa.

"Have we got to go through all that horrible business?"

"I'm afraid so," said Adye gently.

"I'll tell them then," almost whispered Gurney as he returned to the door.

"How does your wife say Lady Ware is?" Adye inquired.

"Quite quiet. She's lying down in her room."

"Does she know they've found —?"

"Yes."

Gurney passed out into the hall, leaving Ware and Adye still in the library, and by the front door met the party with their sad burden. Ware with an effort turned to Adye and walked to the door.

"Let us go into my wife's morning room while —"

He had no need to finish the sentence, but hurriedly

crossed the hall, looking neither to the right nor to the left, with Adye behind him, and entered Magdalen's charming sanctum. A bevy of men's voices reached them from the hall, and Ware closed the door upon them quickly. Meanwhile no time had been lost by delaying the necessary obligations to be performed. Acting upon the instructions of Dr. Winter, and with the concurrence of Inspector Watkin, one of the dragging-men had been dispatched with a message to the coroner and a request to a nurse, who lived within a mile's distance, to come to Wilbury immediately and carry out the last duties upon the dead body.

And now Sir Henry Egerton and Marston Gurney, with the help of Rate, who at last, to his infinite satisfaction, appeared wanted, undertook the supervision of the temporary resting-place of Eustace Ede. A long narrow Jacobean table was carried into the library and placed in the middle of the room in place of the writing-table, which was pushed against the wall, and the covered form of the boy, a quantity of weeds having already been removed from it by Dr. Winter, was laid upon it. Rate, always with an eye to the decorous and prescriptive, dropped the window-blinds, made a few apposite remarks to Gurney in a stage whisper, and on tip-toe was the last to close the door as he followed Egerton and Gurney to the hall.

Dr. Winter and Inspector Watkin were there talking gravely in an undertone; the swing-door leading eventually to the servants' quarters was again ajar with a solid phalanx of excited domestics of both sexes, holding it open for a surreptitious peep at the final arrangements, or for the overhearing of the tail-end of some sentence which, added to a concocted commencement, would make acceptable gossip below stairs; and standing upon the terrace immediately outside the main entrance to the house was the group of Wilbury's four gardeners. The news of the tragedy had spread like wildfire. On receipt of it Paterson and Rickworth were exceedingly quick to leave their latest "hope-fuls" and their wives, to whom, however, with lightning alacrity, they imparted the shock after the doctor's insistence on absolute quiet. And Branch who, as Durnwell

stated, had been engaged in the kitchen garden the entire afternoon, emerged from his potatoes and overturned a basketful. All these were anxious for the latest details, over which, we may take it for granted, Durnwell had not been less prolix than usual. But at this particular instant he had apparently, after a prolonged narrative, been relegated to a minor position of importance by Paterson, who, with emphatic gestures, was addressing the other three.

It was, in fact, clear that Paterson, for a reason which we shall hear of shortly, had resumed the leading part. Rickworth and Branch, with their hands on their hips, were listening to him open-mouthed, while from Durnwell's glum attitude it might have been conjectured that the statements of Paterson were of less moment than his assumption of what actors call "the centre of the stage." But all four were in complete harmony in one respect—their point of view of the tragic affair. It could not be better explained than by the quotation of one categorical remark from Paterson.

"I *told* M'Pherson 'e'd regret goin' to Aberdeen to bury 'is aunt."

Sir Henry Egerton joined Dr. Winter and Inspector Watkin in their serious whispered conversation; Rate ventured, with more than his customary cadaverous expression, upon a hushed suggestion to Marston Gurney, coughed significantly on approaching the swing-door, thus causing behind it a general crackling of stiff print skirts and an universal retreat of squeaking shoes, and, having passed through to the servants' quarters with an erectness born of a decidedly superior position, beckoned solemnly to the housemaids, ordered them, as he put it, to "lower the blinds throughout the mansion," and finally, while awaiting any further summons, retreated to the pantry to partake of another glass of port.

Directly the door swung to, Egerton beckoned silently to Gurney:

"Where is Sir Hubert?" he asked.

"In there with Adye," replied Gurney, as he indicated the morning-room.

In another moment he turned the handle of the door cautiously.

"Come in, my dear Egerton," said Ware from within.

Egerton obeyed the quiet summons, and stepped into the room with Dr. Winter, Inspector Watkin, and Marston Gurney.

All five men remained standing. Not one was at his ease. The silence was so painful that the breathing of some could be heard. The Angel of Death filled the air.

Egerton was the first to speak. He informed Ware how the body had been placed in the library, and of the communication sent to the coroner. Ware extended his hand to Egerton, which the other retained for a while during his hesitation to make further pronouncement. At length he said:

"There's one circumstance in the accident that perplexes us very much."

"What do you mean?"

"Had Eustace had any quarrel with anyone immediately before his death?"

"Quarrel?"

"Yes, within say—"

"Half an hour," Dr. Winter interrupted quickly.

"Not that I know of," replied Ware anxiously.

"I mean a violent quarrel."

"Impossible."

"No one had any grudge against him, I suppose?"

"Against Eustace? Never. Why, Egerton?"

Adye and Gurney stared at the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department, and each of them was thinking the same—that it was rather unnecessary, to say the least of it, in an accident of this nature to introduce a Scotland Yard element.

"Only this," answered Egerton, "that in examining the body, Dr. Winter found—"

"Clear marks upon the throat," interposed the police surgeon, "which could have been caused by the pressure of fingers, and if so, certainly with violence."

Ware, Adye and Gurney looked at him in horror.

"Furthermore," continued Dr. Winter, "there is a distinct contusion upon the forehead over the left eye with a small abrasion likely to have been caused by contact with something sharp or hard."

This additional information made a profound impression upon those who heard it for the first time, and Egerton took Ware's arm very sympathetically.

"I'm awfully sorry, my dear fellow," he said, "but I know, however painful it must be to you, that you'll realize Dr. Winter is only doing his duty."

"Certainly, but—" And Ware failed to frame a sentence.

"But these marks," said Adye, rather scornfully; "might not the hooks be responsible for them?"

"I'm afraid not," was the doctor's answer. "The hooks caught the body at once under the back."

"If Sir Hubert will pardon my interference," the K.C. continued, "I should like to point out, Dr. Winter, that any suggestion of this nature must not be made thoughtlessly or at random. There is much to be considered here. The tragedy in itself must inevitably cause great sorrow to Lady Ware. But if this is added—!"

He spoke strongly, as he felt. The sense of protection of the woman he loved surged in upon him.

"I quite agree, Adye," said Egerton. "And if it were possible, I'm sure Dr. Winter and Inspector Watkin would avoid all allusion to this."

"You could rely on me for that, Sir 'Ubert," said the inspector in a penetrating voice, utterly out of tune with the occasion. "But, Sir 'Ubert, there's more than this." And he referred to his inevitable note-book and read from it: "Paterson, the gardener, was near the other end of the lake on his way to his wife at the time the young gentleman was bathing." The inspector drew in a long breath and continued reading his note more loudly than ever: "It seems he stopped walking for a while as he felt the heat, and from where he stood, that's a bare half-mile away, he saw, he thought, something in the water, but distinctly perceived the punt with a man in it bending low over its side."

Ware listened as if stunned, and Gurney was ashen pale.

"Then some one did unchain that punt after Mr. Gurney had fastened it?" said Adye.

"Evidently, sir," roared out the inspector, "if Paterson is correct."

"Could Paterson distinguish the man at all?"

"No, sir. He was too far away. That's the trouble."

"To clear this up, Ware," continued Adye, "because it's of great importance, would you care to have Paterson in to question him?"

"I must say I think it would be as well," was the quiet answer. "I do feel that my wife should be spared all unnecessary pain. These horrible suggestions must remain confidential if there's nothing substantial behind them, don't you think?"

"That's exactly how I feel about it," agreed Adye. "Is the man there?"

"I'll fetch him," volunteered Gurney, who hastened from the room, and found the four gardeners still in close confabulation on the terrace.

"I'm afraid if Paterson is at all like Durnwell," said Egerton, "secrecy will be out of the question."

"Probably all over the village by this time, confound it!" rapped out Adye. "It's dead certain to reach some of the jury before the inquest. Then they'll put an awkward question. Ware, tell me, is this man Paterson fairly reliable?"

"Good enough chap, I fancy. There's nothing against him except he's a bit fond of his beer, and was had up before the bench a few weeks ago for brawling in the village. My wife insisted, though, in looking over it."

"Ah; pity!" muttered Adye. "If she hadn't done that, both of you might have been spared a good deal."

CHAPTER XIII

THEY all waited anxiously for Paterson's appearance, and Ware seated himself near the window as the gardener came into the room with Gurney. He gave a faint smile of recognition to Paterson, who put up one finger to his forehead deferentially. There was nothing remarkable about Paterson's appearance. Like a good many other gardeners, he looked older than his forty-five summers, that was all that was noticeable. His face was as lined as a map.

"Ask him anything you like," said Ware to Inspector Watkin.

The inspector cleared his throat for a tremendous effort in the presence of one of the most able members of the Bar and the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department. Preferment undoubtedly loomed in the distance.

"Now, my man," he began in thundering tones, "I want to caution you to adhere strictly to the truth."

"That's my way, I 'opes, Sir 'Ubert," Paterson interrupted, drawing himself up, and ignoring, as Durnwell did, every one but his master.

Sir Hubert nodded with a smile.

"Sir 'Ubert wishes you to repeat to him," continued the inspector, "what it was you saw."

"Or thought you saw," interposed Egerton.

"There be no thinkin' about it, Sir 'Ubert. I see clear enough, though —"

"Though what?" was the quick question from the K.C., who was quite unable to suppress it.

"Well, Sir 'Ubert, I doesn't mind ownin' up, I doesn't, that after the babby was aborn last night I did 'ave a glass at the 'Duck and Goose.'"

"More than one, perhaps," suggested Adye.

"Well, Sir 'Ubert, there 'ad to be two, that's sure — one

to the missus and tother to the babby. It be our ninth, it be, and the fust boy."

"And one to the father, eh?" asked Egerton.

"Well, Sir 'Uberty, to tell the truth, I be that done, I be, that I didn't sees 'ow to leave myself out."

"Quite right," said Ware approvingly.

"And then, perhaps," pursued Adye in his cross-examination, "there were some friends of yours in the 'Duck and Goose'? I should say you're a man with plenty of friends, Paterson."

Paterson, as he said afterwards, liked the lawyer. "'E be a gentleman, 'e be." Accordingly he condescended to answer him.

"There be a tidy few, sir," he said.

"And they very properly drank your health, didn't they?"

"Oh, yes, sir, they does that."

"And, of course, you very properly drank theirs?"

"Well, sir, I be a man of honour, I be."

"Quite right, Paterson. I should have done the same. And how many friends of yours were there in the 'Duck and Goose'?"

"Four or five, I'm thinkin', sir."

"Possibly six?"

"Maybe, sir."

"Or nine?"

"Oh, no, sir, there be no nine." And the gardener was most emphatic.

"Eight, then? Come now, a popular fellow like you."

Paterson's face simply grinned with pride.

"Well, yes, sir, there might 'ave been eight. It be an even chance."

"Quite so. And this morning and most of to-day I suppose you've rather suffered for it, eh? One generally does."

"Ah, sir, but that be the truth. My 'ead's a-been thump-in' since the marnin'."

"Naturally. One can't help these things. And I dare say to-day with the heat and everything you wouldn't be so sure of your sight as usual?"

"P'r'aps not, sir. There be somethin' in that, but I, be pretty sure."

Adye indicated to Inspector Watkin that he had finished, and the inspector, not over-pleased with the K.C.'s interruption, renewed the attack.

"Now, Paterson," he went on in his noisy, blundering way, which formed a striking contrast to Adye's subtlety, "tell Sir 'Ubert about the punt."

Every one was silent while Paterson looked at his master.

"Well, I be near the far end of the lake a-goin' 'ome to the wife when I stops and looks round. And out on the water beyond the shed I sees the punt, and I thinks, I say I *thinks*, someone a-bathin'."

"In the water?" queried the inspector loudly.

"That's right, Sir 'Ubert. Then in the punt, Sir 'Ubert, I sees a man a-bendin' over the side of 'er low down, so to speak, over the water?"

"You couldn't tell us how he was dressed, you said," continued Watkin.

"No, that I could not, Sir 'Ubert. I be too far, Sir 'Ubert, and the glare of the sun be fierce like. That be all I see, Sir 'Ubert, and I takes no notice of it at the time. It was so natural like, Sir 'Ubert."

"Of course," replied Ware. "Now, Paterson, it would be as well for you to keep this to yourself. Her ladyship is naturally terribly distressed at this calamity, and if any suggestion were made of there being anything more than an accident it would pain her cruelly. You understand?"

"I understand quite, Sir 'Ubert."

"Have you told anybody besides us?" asked Adye.

"Well, yes, sir?"

"How many?"

"Only about 'arf a dozen, I thinks, sir."

"Half a dozen!"

There was a pause, and the inspector turned to Ware.

"You don't wish to ask him anything further, Sir 'Ubert?" he asked.

"No," was the serious reply.

Paterson touched his head again with his forefinger and

left the room. In doing so he almost fell over one of the footmen outside, who was inconveniently close to the door-handle.

"Most unfortunate," muttered Adye. "The man's story when tested amounts to very little. Damnation!"

"But, my dear Adye," said Egerton, "it doesn't stand alone, worse luck!"

"You mean Dr. Winter's examination?" Egerton nodded. "You've er — no doubt at all in your mind, Dr. Winter?"

"None," replied the doctor, "the finger-marks on the throat are clear and recent, also the contusion and abrasion on the forehead."

"But the suggestion is horrible and preposterous," exclaimed Ware.

"Here is the poor boy who leaves us but a few minutes before to bathe. Durnwell sees him after he left us absolutely alone. He's apparently the only person who did see him, and surely no one is going even to hint that Durnwell —" He broke off into a contemptuous laugh.

"Of course that's ridiculous," agreed Egerton.

"And Eustace hadn't an enemy in the world!" continued Ware.

"Plenty of money in the purse and pockets, too, Sir 'Uberty," joined in the inspector as he proceeded to refer to his note-book. "So that couldn't have been the motive of the crime."

"Crime!" ejaculated Ware forcibly. "The idea is outrageous — childish. And I'll trouble you to keep that word out of this. It must be avoided at all costs at the inquest. Let that be thoroughly understood."

As master of the house Sir Hubert's fresh attitude appealed strongly to Adye, who was only thinking anxiously of Magdalen and the effect of such a revelation upon her. And it reduced the professional element in the room to silence. Inspector Watkin stared expressionlessly before him, and Dr. Winter with a dubious shake of his head wiped his pincenez with his handkerchief, while Sir Henry Egerton, who, as Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department, was in a quasi-official position in the matter, but was really

there as a friend of the family, sat down in evidently very perplexed thought.

The painful silence in the room, during which each of the six grave men was regarding the catastrophe from his own point of view, lasted for several seconds. It was the K.C. who broke it. He turned to the Doctor and "handled" him discreetly.

"Dr. Winter," he said, "would you at the inquest feel it incumbent upon you to enter into these details you have described to us?"

Adye, Ware, and Gurney hung anxiously upon the delayed answer.

"I — I'm afraid so," whispered the police surgeon. "You see I —"

"Thank you, Doctor," said Adye charmingly. "That's all I wanted to know. And the conclusion you've come to, I may take it, you are prepared to give on oath?"

"I am. If they were only possible deductions, a mere tissue of hypotheses, I should not think twice about them in such a grave matter. But they amount to a positive certainty in my mind. And, believe me, Sir Hubert," he added gently as he turned to Ware, "I am deeply sorry to have to say this."

A further silence fell upon the room, and Dr. Winter continued:

"May I say, however, that I should be more than pleased for any medical man you like to name to meet me in the matter with a view to a confirmation, or otherwise, of my conclusions?"

"That is very fair of you, Dr. Winter," said Adye.

"Who generally attends you, Sir Hubert?" asked the doctor.

"Dr. Seddleton," answered Ware. "He was here but a few minutes ago to see my wife."

"Dr. Seddleton; certainly. May I telephone to him at once?"

"By all means."

Gurney conducted Dr. Winter to the telephone in the hall,

and the reply was that Dr. Seddleton would come immediately. As he left the receiver the hospital nurse, whom he had summoned, was admitted to the house, and went with him without delay into the silent library, there to give the last attention to all that was left of Eustace Ede.

Gurney returned alone to the morning-room door, where he encountered Inspector Watkin, who, with a perfunctory "Good afternoon, sir," passed by him with a heavy tread, into the laughing sunlight. As he followed the roadway every stone on it seemed to spell mystery to him. Being off duty, he lighted his pipe carefully, and puffed out the smoke through his big, coarse lips with a sigh of exceptional contentment. Obviously he must extract his notebook again, and ruminate. This was a wonderful case, he thought. Why, it was in high society! It had a sensational glamour all over it! It was the chance of his life! If only he could unravel it! Promotion was leaping into his arms! He would be transferred to London for a certainty! He must go and tell his wife! What did somebody say about an "ill wind"?

But while the inspector was in this high state of optimism, Egerton was wondering, after a suggestion to the contrary from the experienced K.C., who had descried an over-eagerness on the inspector's part, whether he could entrust this inquiry safely to Watkin's hands.

"Anyhow," he said, "there's no need to hurry. It would be rather unfair at this stage to supersede him. And I think his head is screwed on pretty right. I'll wait till the inquest is over. There's never any knowing what a coroner's jury may do. They are always capable of anything."

He extended his hand warmly to Sir Hubert.

"Must you go, Egerton?"

"Yes, I must walk across to my cottage and catch the six train up. I'm due at Scotland Yard on the Soho case as I told you. Good-bye, my dear fellow." He lowered his voice as he turned by the door. "My love to your wife."

But Ware sat in his chair with no light in his eyes. The mention of the Soho case, which, like all interesting criminal

cases, had so fascinated him but a little over an hour ago, evoked no enthusiasm from him now. Indeed, it fell upon deaf ears.

Egerton made his way through the beautiful park to his cottage. He had been connected with countless cases of crime and mystery, and to his mind, whatever degree of tragedy and suffering they may have involved, they remained but cases to him. The "Black Museum" at Scotland Yard, which he was always ready to show his friends, contained numerous relics of famous trials — counterfeit coins, the box of poisons used by Neil Cream, the respective ropes, with their grim nooses, that hung Fowler and Milsom and Crippen, and interesting photographs to the morbid. All these and many more formed part of his life's work, and they were not unnaturally to him only links in a chain, chapters of a story, scenes of a play, fragments of a *case*. Quite right. Business is business. And in Egerton's line the guilty must be discovered and pay the price. It would not be his province to deviate from the point. He must not feel. He must make straight for his prey remorselessly, regardless of the misery and the torture brought to the relatives of the creature of the chase, unmindful of all but that justice must be done. Like every man in his particular profession, be he doctor, surgeon, advocate, judge, he must be a machine and keep its component parts well oiled. The world would stand still if it were otherwise. It is only the intrusion of the personal element that can alter the point of view. And here at Wilbury it thrust itself signally upon Egerton. The end of Eustace Ede brought pain to him. He knew the boy. And then the tragedy was full of sorrow for his friends whom he liked, and whose hospitality he enjoyed. He felt strongly for Lady Ware, who, as Eustace's sister, would suffer acutely if this theory of the doctor was substantiated. It was a horrible thought to him. And he hoped devoutly that by hook or by crook the coroner's jury would not act upon it. If Eustace Ede was murdered he trusted that it would never be openly suggested, and that his case might be joined to that countless number of deaths, "from natural or accidental

causes," when in fact the hand of a felon has done it, which are going on around us in all degrees of society on a good many days out of the three hundred and sixty-five in every year. This catastrophe was not a *case* to him. It was a deep anxiety.

Meanwhile Dr. Seddleton had returned to Wilbury promptly in answer to Dr. Winter's summons, in his little two-cylinder car. The spluttering of its engine attracted Dr. Winter's attention, and without ceremony he conducted his fellow-practitioner to the library, where they remained for some time. From the morning-room, Ware, Adye, and Gurney had also heard the car, and through the door, which Adye opened, saw the two doctors enter the sad room on the other side of the hall. While they awaited the result scarcely a word passed between them. Each of the three, however, was anxiously speculating upon it, and in the process all of them came silently to the same sanguine conjecture — that Dr. Seddleton would act up to his reputation, and give undoubtedly a non-committal opinion; that as to both questions, whether the marks upon the throat were caused by the pressure of fingers, and the contusion and abrasion by a blow, his answer would be that they might have been or might not have been. All three, indeed, were thankful that Dr. Winter did not ask for a different second opinion, and after a lapse of some minutes their suspense was terminated by the mild and cheerful voice of Dr. Seddleton as the door was slowly opened.

"May we come in?" he asked.

"Please, Dr. Seddleton," answered Ware.

The bidding of Sir Hubert was accepted by both medical men, and in answer to their inquiring faces Dr. Seddleton cleared his throat as a prelude to verbosity. "I — er — have — er — made an examination," he began, "on the invitation of Dr. Winter, and being always prone, though you may not have remarked it, Sir Hubert, to the exercise of caution in diagnosis, the human frame being an excessively complex structure, and the world in which we live a labyrinth of doubt, a quagmire of uncertainty, yet in this case, I am happy to say, there is no measure of doubt in my mind at

all — none at all. I most emphatically agree in every respect with Dr. Winter's conclusions. They are irresistible."

Ware, Adye, and Gurney were heavily hit by the blow, and, after some hesitation, Ware glanced at Dr. Winter and Dr. Seddleton, the one looking strong and grave, the other smiling blandly, and with a laconic expression of thanks indicated plainly that he had nothing further to add.

In a minute or two the spluttering of the two-cylinder car was again audible as it conveyed the two doctors away.

A deep depression took hold of the occupants of the morning-room. Not a syllable was uttered. And after some moments Ware rose from his chair without a word and went out to pace the terrace alone.

"This is perfectly ghastly," said Gurney under his breath.

"Yes," replied Adye, "it's terrible to think of what Lady Ware has to endure. Publicity in any form is obnoxious to her. But *this* form —"

"God! What rotters doctors are!" exclaimed the younger man.

"Marston, tell your wife to keep all this from Lady Ware till to-morrow. Let her get through the night as well as she possibly can."

He walked up and down the room with a set face. The underhung jaw showed clearly that he was nerving himself to meet a crisis. It was a crisis to him because it was a crisis to her. He felt as a big, strong, manly fellow does feel where the idol of his life has to suffer. His very heart-strings were being sundered. If he could but remain to succour her! If he could but give her the love that she deserved! Or, failing that, if there were but some man upon the earth worthy of her with the right to hold her up, in whose arms with all her womanly frailty she could rest! If the world were but differently made! If its laws could be altered, its conventions smashed! If we could but break them with impunity and then laugh at them at ease! Nature could but rule!

"Are you going back to town to-day?" asked Gurney at length.

"Yes, at once." And Adye stopped suddenly in his walk. "What's that?" he asked.

"My wife, I believe," replied Gurney.

He opened the door wide, and the two men, to their astonishment, saw Magdalen and Celia. The former came to the morning-room, and in a quiet voice, which was quite under control, asked Gurney to go to his wife. He did so, closing the door after him.

Never in Magdalen's life, thought Adye as he gazed upon her, had she looked so overpoweringly beautiful. She had come down straight from her troubled rest, and was attired charmingly in a simple white tea-gown of an elusive Liberty material which clung somewhat closely to her figure and defined its exquisite lines. Her face was pale and grave, but there was about her a look of brave resignation, almost of repose, now that the first shock had passed, a wonderful dignity in sorrow. The great grey-blue eyes seemed even larger than before, the delicately dark pencilled brows more striking, the golden streaked hair more brilliant. There are some faces which grief does not spoil.

Adye, who was deeply moved, stepped forward to her slowly in silence. He could not speak. There was no need. She understood. He merely took her hands in his as he looked into her eyes, which, as they remained steadily fixed upon his, wore an expression of great purity and goodness.

He was shaken. He let her hands fall and walked to the door. She did not stir from her position. He turned the handle, and then let it jerk back. He was making up his mind to speak. Then in a low tone, with a depth of feeling in it which went straight to her heart, he said: "You won't forget your promise to me, Magdalen, about money matters?"

"No," she answered gently. "I—I'm glad I saw you before you went."

The next instant he was gone. There was safety in distance again. And he must put miles between them. He hurriedly told Ware upon the terrace that no one need bother about his car, and that he would walk round to the garage himself. He also told him that his wife was alone in the

morning-room, and that in his opinion she ought to remain in ignorance of this horrible development in the tragedy until the morning.

Ware held out his hand, which Adye took, and the two men regarded each other with strange feelings. It would be impossible to describe them. In a few more minutes the K.C. in his big car was returning to London.

Ware hesitated before joining his wife. Finally he went to her, and found her seated with a piece of paper in her hand, which she continued to read without removing her eyes from it. He stood beside her for some time apparently unnoticed, watching her intently, and at length she held out the paper mechanically.

"I found this on his table — afterwards," she murmured.

It was Eustace's unfinished letter to her, which had touched her greatly. He took it in his hand, and with a face drawn with pain he read it silently to the end. Only the suggestion of a moan escaped him as he gave it back to her.

"It's terribly sad," she said, "but I — I'm glad he wrote it. Poor Eustace!" She paused for a moment, and on noticing his very grave expression, said suddenly: "How do you read it, Hubert?"

"How do you mean?" he asked almost inaudibly.

"I mean, what was his intention?"

Ware did not reply for a second or two. It was plain to Magdalen that he was affected by the boy's spontaneity as she was, and that he felt with her how much they had misunderstood him.

"It's evident from his words what — what he meant," he answered with difficulty. "He says distinctly that he wanted you to have some of the money while he lived, and — and that he would have it seen to — on his return from Hanover."

Magdalen barely caught the conclusion of his sentence. It was almost lost as he moved away to the window.

"Then nothing else about it strikes you?" she asked.

"No." And the reply was whispered.

"It didn't Celia either. Oh, I'm glad!"

Ware turned round from the window, and, with his hands behind his back, looked at his wife perplexedly.

"I — I don't understand," he said.

"I only had a horrible fear — all wrong, I'm sure now — lest Eustace killed himself intentionally."

"But —"

"I know what you're going to say," interrupted Magdalen quickly. "Celia said the same. He speaks of returning from Hanover, and of course that's a proof I was wrong. Oh, I'm glad I was wrong!"

The tears welled up into her eyes, and she passed through the doorway slowly. There was nothing more to be said. Not even tragedy could reunite these two. She wished to be alone with her thoughts. He was content for her to be so. She wished him to be alone with his.

And as she traversed the hall, now darkened by the dropped blinds, and with faltering step approached the library door to look upon the face of her brother, the big grandfather clock boomed the hour. It was five. Only five! And less than three hours ago she herself, the beautiful figure in white, had stood upon the edge of the lake.

How much can happen in three hours!

CHAPTER XIV

SOME days had passed at Wilbury, and all that has to happen in a house after a calamity of this nature had happened in the duly prescribed order and strictly orthodox fashion of this well-regulated country. The house was besieged by human beings of all kinds. The front-door bell was scarcely ever silent. Cards of condolence poured in from the country people, who, with few exceptions, when coming up the drive, which skirted the far end of the lake, made a point of telling the chauffeur or coachman to slow down with the sole object of having a look at the water. "Kind inquiries" after "her ladyship" were frequently brought on foot, so that on the way a peep at the bathing-shed might be had. The whole neighbourhood was filled with curiosity, and the Wilbury catastrophe was the sole topic of conversation at every table for miles round. There was, too, universal sympathy for Magdalen, who was conspicuously popular in all circles, partly through her charm of manner, partly through her exceptional beauty, though here and there some, who were less endowed, could be heard in a whisper to maintain with conviction, and not without some hope, that this would knock her about considerably. "Oh, no, my dear, you don't go through those shocks without them leaving *some* mark."

There was a large gathering of all classes at the funeral in the little churchyard upon the hill, which, to the disappointment of several, Magdalen did not attend, cheating them thereby of any observance of her looks in mourning, comment upon its excessiveness or its paucity, and of criticism of her bearing. Such as these, who swarm at funerals and weddings alike, and whom at either precious little escapes, had to be content with a careful scrutiny of Sir Hubert's face, which all seemed to agree was as handsome as ever and

extremely grave, a general approval of the outward grief of the Wilbury household, and a thorough examination of the profusion of flowers, which were pronounced to be gorgeous, and of the very sympathetic inscriptions on the cards attached to them. Many of the wreaths had come from London, and of their number not a few had been ordered by letter or telegram, with the price named, by acquaintances of the Wares who happened to be abroad at the time, indulging in after-cures, or climbing mountains, or speaking vile Italian on the Lake of Como, and who supposed they ought to send some flowers, though it really was a great tax when the acquaintanceship was so slight.

But not unnaturally the greatest interest of all, both local and general, was taken in the inquest, which, after several adjournments, was expected to terminate to-day. That gave everybody a deal to talk about and read about. At any time of year, when the position of the persons concerned is remembered, the inquiry would have been given prominence in the papers; but in the autumn, in the dead season, with Parliament, strange to say, not sitting, the staggering absence of all strikes, and no foreign complications except the perennially worked-up invasion scare, the space and attention accorded to it in the press were enormous. It occupied the chief page, the drought being relegated to the next. Flaming headlines and startling placards were ubiquitous: "Drowned in the Lake"; "Sensational Inquest"; "The Bathing-shed Mystery"; "The Man in the Punt"; "What the Gardener saw"; "Story of the Weed-gardener, amusing witness"; "Doctors' examination, grim suggestions"; "Famous Beauty's evidence, how Lady Ware gave it"; "Baronet's Brother-in-law Drowned"; "The Wilbury Tragedy"; this is but a limited selection. Then elaborate descriptions of the lake, accompanied by photographs of the scene of the disaster marked with a cross, the bathing-shed, the punt, Sir Hubert and Lady Ware—dreadful libels—and poor Eustace Ede, who, had he lived, would never have achieved the fame of publication; sketches of witnesses at the inquest, with letter-press, including Inspector Watkin, "who made himself heard in every corner of the room"; Dr. Winter, a down-

right police surgeon; Dr. Seddleton, "a small local practitioner"; Paterson, to his annoyance, a small head; and Durnwell, "a believer in large families," to his infinite pleasure, a big head, "whose attention to the weeds afforded relief to the painful investigation."

All this had to be. It was inevitable, however great the suffering caused to a temperament like Magdalen's. Some have advertisement thrust upon them. That was her case. Some achieve advertisement, but they are very different persons, merely curiosities and figures of fun, fighting for the limelight, leading a pathetic existence with an interviewer in one pocket and a sycophant in the other because they are not clever enough to do without them, causing the publication of statements that they are this or that, which nobody believes, endeavouring to force themselves into positions to which their colleagues invariably decline to elect them, consistently proclaiming in advance what they are going to do, and inflicting much disappointment in the fulfilment, but nevertheless innocently causing considerable amusement to the world, which would be a dull hole without its charlatans. To such as these even an affair of this kind would be better than nothing. It would be an excellent advertisement. They would get something out of it. It would keep them in the public eye. But it was thrust upon Magdalen, and it was loathsome to her. She was in her bedroom on this day alone with Celia while the intelligent coroner's jury was sitting below in the hall. The strain and wretchedness of the last few days had taxed her strength greatly. Blow after blow had struck her, and the shock she had sustained from the conclusion of the doctors had shaken her and made her indignant. In an interview with them before the inquiry she had begged them in vain to think well before hinting at such a thing in public. "Is not my brother's death in itself sufficient for me to bear," she had urged, "without your suggesting murder?" She had given her evidence, as had Ware, with dignity, she describing how her brother, who was a very weak swimmer, had gone to bathe in the usual way, leaving her in the library, Ware corroborating her and saying how he left his wife in the library to join the party on the

croquet lawn, and also that the boy was due to start for the German family on the Monday, to whom he had written that very day. Additionally, upon Michael Adye's advice Magdalen had produced Eustace's unfinished letter to her in the desperate hope that the coroner's jury, whose ways, as Sir Henry Egerton put it, are inscrutable, might possibly return a verdict of suicide, if not accidental death. That, she thought, would be painful enough, but it would be preferable to murder. Anything rather than that.

These various points she was at this moment recapitulating to Celia vehemently. She retraversed the ground in detail and referred to the coroner's jury contemptuously. She had been greatly tried, but whereas in public she had preserved her self-possession and quiet dignity, when alone with her friend she could let herself go. "The questions some of the creatures put to me!" she exclaimed.

"Had Eustace any enemies? Had any one a grudge against him? Had any one anything to gain by his death?"

"Yes," said Celia, "but you fairly shut the gentleman up then. When you answered straight, 'No one but myself,' I thought he'd explode."

Magdalen paced the room restlessly, beating one hand upon the other as she walked. Her windows were wide open upon another very hot day, and a babel of voices from the terrace reached her plainly. She went to her window to look out, and saw a knot of men laughing and talking and lighting pipes and cigarettes. They were reporters, and there were no more shorthand notes to be taken. She only remained at the window for a moment, but it was long enough for one gentleman to obtain an excellent snap-shot. As the click of the "shutter" went Magdalen hastened back angrily into the room.

"Oh, to get away from everybody — to hide one's head!" she cried.

A knock then came upon the door.

"Who's there?" she asked nervously.

"Hubert," was the answer. "Can I come in?"

"Unlock the door, Celia, dear, will you?"

The girl did so, and Ware walked in slowly.

"I only came to tell you that the verdict will be out very soon," he said quietly. "They're considering it now. I thought you'd like to know."

Magdalen inclined her head, and Ware returned to the doorway.

"I'll come back directly I hear," he added.

He closed the door after him.

"Oh, if they'll only allow poor Eustace to lie there in peace!" Magdalen exclaimed as she pointed towards the hill.

"If they only would! This is so cruel."

"Perhaps they will, dear. We can't say."

"That would be something — something!"

Celia did all she could to soothe her by word and action, but there is the great fact that a woman in her trials needs more than a woman. She is all very well so far as she goes, but when the greatest want in life is absent the best she can do is to play second fiddle. This was the tragedy of Magdalen at this moment. She was the wife of Sir Hubert Ware, but she had no husband. There was Michael Adye, the man she loved and who loved her. They were made and meant for each other, these two. She had only to give way and seek him out. A telegram to the north, where he was engaged politically, would summon him to her aid. But this woman was built differently. She must think of *him* with all her might, and on his account make all regrets, all her longings stand still. "If thou faint in the day of adversity thy strength is small."

For another half hour the two friends remained where they were. A few commonplaces with prolonged pauses were uttered, but nothing more. Magdalen said the chintz covers in the room had faded, and the other agreed with her. Celia drew attention to a small piece of stained glass with the arms of England upon it let into one of the old windows, as if she had only heard of it for the first time.

"I love that," she said. "To think it was placed there all those years ago because Queen Elizabeth slept in the room."

"Yes, it's been called the Queen's Room ever since."

Then a delightful bullfinch in his cage upon the table

bowed and piped his two tunes through merrily, and when Celia approached the bars swore at her roundly.

At last came the sound of many feet from the old paved terrace below, and a general hubbub, and once again a knock upon the bedroom door. This time it was Marston Gurney. He was pale and agitated.

"Is — is it over?" asked Magdalen.

"Yes." And a frown crossed Gurney's face.

"Well?"

The young man hesitated and screwed up his courage to answer.

"They've — they've done it, the fools."

"What?"

"I'm sorry, Lady Ware — they've brought it in as murder — a verdict of wilful murder against a person or persons unknown."

Magdalen shook perceptibly, and sank into a chair, covering her face with her hands.

Outside, groups of people were excitedly discussing the result. Inspector Watkin was bawling his refusal to answer questions. Dr. Seddleton's two-cylinder car was spluttering once more as its owner and Dr. Winter took their departure together, and a score of reporters' boys were racing for their lives on bicycles to wire the news to London.

CHAPTER XV

THE evidence and the verdict caused a sensation. The papers were full of it. The public devoured them. A "Society murder," as it was called, is a rare specimen. It is only the Divorce Court that can provide a "hardy annual." Accordingly it was read, perhaps, by a larger circle of people. To begin with, there was nothing about the story to cause the papers to be hidden by fond parents from unmarried daughters and boys still at school, though it may be open to argument whether such concealment is effective or futile; and again, whereas many persons never read the conventional, sordid crime, they will do so if, as in a case like this, it is clothed with some distinction and refinement, and has a *cachet* about it. Here were Sir Hubert Ware, Bart., and Lady Ware, well known and popular for reasons we have seen, and sympathy for them in such a calamity was widespread. Again, there was considerable diversity of opinion in regard to the verdict. At hundreds of houses it was the subject of debate. Some took the view of the Wares, who openly resented it. Others shook their heads very wisely, and could not accept the theory that the doctors had blundered. Reliance, too, in some quarters was placed upon Paterson's story about the man he saw bending over the punt, a view, however, which was strongly combated by opponents, who urged that his family festivities the night before were not conducive to a clear vision half a mile away. And then, of course, there were those who thought that there was "more than met the eye" in Eustace's unfinished letter to Magdalen. There must have been a quarrel between them over money. Suppose it made him commit suicide. How awful for her! And some "knew for a fact" that the brother and sister did not "hit it off." They also had it on the very best authority that the Wares were in low water;

their sister-in-law had a brother who had a friend who knew a clerk in a stock-broker's office, and *he* said that the Wares were extremely hard pressed at the time of the murder. "And what deduction do you draw from that, Elizabeth?" asked a pater-familias through his teeth.

"Well, it's curious — isn't it? — that Lady Ware should come into that money, just at the right moment," replied his wife.

"That's you all over, Elizabeth. You mean you think Lady Ware murdered him!"

"Well, it's possible."

"Rubbish! Rot! Jack, pass the marmalade. I shall be late for business. The way you rush at conclusions, Elizabeth, is appalling."

"You needn't lose your temper, George."

"Appalling! I — I won't come down to breakfast. I'll have it in bed. This Wilbury case is becoming a perfect obsession with you. For the last three days we've yapped of nothing else, absolutely nothing. I'm sick of it. We don't know the people, and we never shall know them. If you talked sensibly about it, it would be different. But you don't. Nothing but wild theories, mad conclusions, rushing off at tangents. Jack, the toast. We'll bar the subject from this moment. See? We'll bar it altogether. I'm sick of it, I tell you."

A prolonged pause, while Jack, the fifteen-year-old son and heir, passed the toast-rack, and the master of the house took up his morning paper, and rushed at the middle page. "What do *you* think of the Wilbury case, Jack?" he asked at length.

"Well, father, I've got my own idea."

"Oh, you have, have you? Then let's have it."

"I believe Sir Hubert Ware did it."

This was the climax. The father rushed demented to his business, and on his arrival there, in response to inquiries, said that he was not feeling very well, while after his departure a heated discussion between the mother and son was continued. The mother stuck to her guns about Lady Ware. The son was adamant in his theory of Sir Hubert, with the

result that the mother forbade him to come down to luncheon.

"No, when you argue, Jack, you become dictatorial and offensive. I positively dread breakfast of a morning. You must have your lunch upstairs with the children."

"Well, that's rather hard cheese, mother. You were just as dictatorial as I was."

"Leave the room!"

And he did.

In the afternoon the mother expounded her view to three callers, but since none of them were related the argument was carried on amicably. The callers, however, did not see eye to eye with their hostess, nor with each other. One thought "that young secretary, Marston Gurney, who apparently had no great liking for the dead boy — didn't you think? — and had used that punt, had some hand in it." The second suspected Durnwell, the gardener. "Why did he talk so much about 'them weeds' if it wasn't with the object of getting off the point? The third, who happened to be the wife of a briefless barrister who was accustomed to laying down the law, considered the mistake made was in the verdict. "You never can rely upon a coroner's jury, my husband says so. They ought to have brought it in as accidental. Absurd!"

Thus the discussion was pursued everywhere — at breakfasts, luncheons, teas, dinners, at clubs between rubbers, at theatres between the acts, or during them at some plays, at suppers, on golf courses just when you are driving or going to putt — everywhere. Escape from it was impossible. Consequently it was worn threadbare, and when another coal strike was seriously threatened and succeeded to the chief place in the newspaper, it became quickly one of the nine days' wonders, and with the lapse of several weeks it was almost entirely forgotten, except, of course, by friends and acquaintances of the Wares. Just a dull, cold allusion to it might be heard occasionally, as, for instance, that "nothing more seems to have been discovered in that lake affair," at which supporters of the accidental death theory were not surprised, as they consistently maintained that there was

nothing to discover. But they had been trying weeks for Magdalen, and it was far from being a nine days' wonder with her.

Within twenty-four hours of the verdict the general strain had told upon her so severely that a serious nervous breakdown seemed inevitable. Her appetite failed. She could not sleep. Nothing roused her. Her intimates became alarmed, and finally she was ordered to the Engadine, where, the season being long since over, she could be sure of the combination of absolute quiet and fine air. Dr. Seddleton, whom at the time she really was not strong enough to refuse to see, although it was her inclination to do so after the evidence he had given, attended her, and on being asked whether it would not be unwise for her to travel that distance alone with her maid, lapsed into his familiar answer that it might be or might not be. Thus it came about that the Gurneys decided upon their own initiative to accompany her. The departure was arranged hurriedly, as the early removal of Magdalen from the painful surroundings of Wilbury was considered urgent. Accordingly she was taken to her house in Bruton Street, and within a week started upon her journey.

A sigh of relief went up from the entire household when they heard that they were going to London. Most of its members had already come to the conclusion that "the place was 'aunted.'" And now that the "excitement" of the death, the funeral, the inquest, and nice new mourning was over, several of the female servants declared that they had taken "quite a dislike to the place," and that if they had not been going to Bruton Street they would have given notice rather than stay in it. Rate, however, had a contempt for "nerves," which was fortunately shared by his wife, the housekeeper, who, he pointed out pompously one day in the servants' hall, was above such things, and for a time was going alone to occupy the North Lodge. The real cause for this he did not choose to communicate to his fellow-servants. But to Sir Hubert he was candid, and suggested the arrangement for certain reasons of his own. Firstly, some one reliable should remain behind.

"And then, Sir Hubert, the wife's in delicate 'ealth just now, Sir Hubert."

"Oh, really — is she — er —?"

"Yes, Sir Hubert, she be expecting before long a little permanent society."

Ware with difficulty kept a straight face, while the butler continued funereally:

"And at such junctures, Sir Hubert, country air is beneficent, and it's well, in my opinion, for the husband to be as far away as possible. He is but a hindrance I consider, Sir Hubert."

As for Ware himself, it was natural that he, like Magdalen, should be anxious to see the last of Wilbury for a time, if not for ever. Apparently he did not feel the horror of the affair so acutely as she did. At least he did not show it. But he was gifted with an extraordinary amount of self-control, and after the first shock had passed, beyond a certain agitation, he displayed but few outward symptoms of real grief. Did he feel it? An innately selfish person seldom feels grief. He can be extremely emotional at the moment of a catastrophe. But emotion is purely transitory. It is not grief. And egotism can be consistent with emotion; it cannot be with grief.

Furthermore, being entirely out of sympathy with his wife, any feeling for her suffering was never traceable to him by the few in intimate contact with him, though to the outside world, when an opportunity presented itself, he gave a widely different impression. In those circumstances he referred frequently to "my dear wife" and her tribulation, and it would only be the cynic who would mistrust the use of that term of endearment, and feel convinced from its utterance that they were leading a "cat and dog life." The cynic is often right. But without an attempt to analyse wholly his thoughts and feelings it may be assumed that Ware was glad that all the worry was over; that his wife had gone abroad; that he was once more in town and at his club, which some people thought he was rather quick to return to, though they were thankful to welcome him at

the Bridge table; and that he was free to carry on his secret amusements.

The general exodus from Wilbury had been as hastily effected as Magdalen's departure. The oppression was not confined to the servants' hall. "We must clear out as sharp as we can," said Ware one day to Gurney. "I can't breathe in the place. The gloom's awful."

And he went to London alone the evening before Magdalen, leaving hurried directions to Rate to take up most of his things in the morning.

Marston Gurney sympathized with his feeling entirely. He had it too—the sensation of a caged bird fighting to get out, unable to stand still or to think of any subject but escape.

The two men were in the hall on the evening of Ware's departure, waiting for the car.

"Robson's five minutes late," said Ware. "Where the devil is he?"

And he worked off his impatience by lighting one of his cigarettes.

The car then came to the door, and Ware, with dust-coat and goggles, eagerly took his seat.

"Straight to Bruton Street," was his order to the chauffeur.

Robson hesitated to start the engine.

"Why don't you start?"

"There's some one wants to speak to you, Sir Hubert."

"Damn! Who?"

The next instant Inspector Watkin stood by the door of the car and saluted. "Beg pardon, Sir Hubert," came the loud voice. "But I understand you're all leaving for London."

"To-day and to-morrow, yes. Why?"

"Will anyone be left in care of the house that I know, Sir Hubert?"

"Yes, Mrs. Rate."

"I take it you'll have no objection, Sir Hubert, to my going over the place should any necessity arise?"

"Of course not. Marston, explain that to Rate, will you?"

Gurney acquiesced.

"But what necessity could arise?" asked Ware.

"Well, you never know, Sir Hubert. I should like to get at the bottom of this mystery for everybody's sake if I could. If we could solve it, it would be a great relief to the family, Sir Hubert."

"Naturally. And a feather in your cap, eh, Watkin?"

"Well, Sir Hubert, I—" And the inspector smiled grimly with a twist of his head.

"But, my good man, you're on a hopelessly false scent, I tell you. It can't have been anything but accidental."

But once a police inspector forms an opinion, all the evidence in Christendom will not shake it.

"Anyway," continued Ware hurriedly, "you're at liberty to do whatever you like. *Carte blanche*."

"Thank you, Sir Hubert."

"See you to-morrow, Marston."

The next moment the car was rushing through the park, and one of the caged birds had got out.

Inspector Watkin was about to leave when Gurney stopped him and spoke to him in an undertone.

"If you really think it your duty to pursue this further, one thing, I beg of you—don't let it all get to the papers. This horrible publicity has distressed Lady Ware terribly, and—"

"You can rely upon me, sir. The press shall have nothing."

"Thanks. The whole thing must die out now."

Seven weeks passed, and apparently the whole thing had died out.

The papers were silent upon the matter, and everybody, including the Wares, felt sure that it never would be resuscitated.

Sir Hubert, indeed, was leading his own normal existence, and was once again in his normal spirits.

Inspector Watkin had availed himself of his permission

to visit Wilbury, and soon after the general departure from the house went over it with Mrs. Rate after a further examination of the bathing-shed. What he imagined that he was likely to discover must be left to his own brain, which, being a policeman's brain, worked enigmatically. All that Mrs. Rate could report by letter to her husband was that he went away again looking very disappointed. And Mrs. Rate was right. The inspector returned to his wife a dejected man. All his ambitions were shattered. He could find nothing to lead him any further. Every chance of promotion was knocked on the head. He must own himself defeated. It was a bitter disappointment to him to find that his prominence at the inquest was so short-lived. He must now pray for some fresh mystery, but both he and his wife agreed that years must pass before another of the same distinction would be likely to come his way.

"It's bad luck, Victoria, that's what it is," he bawled out to his wife.

He did not bother Mrs. Rate again, but as philosophically as was possible settled down for the next few weeks to his usual humdrum investigation of the colourless, petty crimes which were a woeful anti-climax and bored him greatly. The best was a burglary, but there was nothing particularly unusual about it. Indeed, its only saving clause was that he was requested to go to Whitehall to see the Director of Public Prosecutions upon the matter. That was something. His self-importance reasserted itself to some extent when he travelled to London with his bag of papers and "clues" to keep the appointment, but it was a shadow of what it would have been were it the Wilbury case instead.

During the quarter of an hour that he awaited the summons to the Director's room in the great building in Parliament Street he occupied the minutes in reflection and regret and disappointment. But his wife, who had had in no sense an easy time with him at home, had invariably impressed upon him the wisdom of hope. That was all that he had to cling to, and it did not satisfy him. Indeed, when he was conducted into the Director's presence he was

extremely dispirited, and it required some effort on his part to show his customary enthusiasm in the commonplace burglary case. The presence, too, of Sir Henry Egerton brought back memories to him. But in answer to the questions of the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department, he was able, after clearing his throat, to give loud and useful answers which, as they appeared to satisfy his hearers, helped to cheer his spirits and enable him to produce his evidence from the bag with a modicum of self-satisfaction.

Finally the Director, with a pair of wonderfully penetrating eyes set in a keen-featured face, gave his instructions emphatically for the surprise capture of a suspected criminal, and laid that deadly net for which he was famous, and which, when once he had set it, was extraordinarily hard to escape.

The discussion was over, and the inspector proceeded to gather up his papers methodically.

"Not an uninteresting case," said the Director musingly.

"Not so interesting as the Wilbury affair though, eh, Watkin?" put in Egerton, with a humorous wink at the Director while the inspector's back was turned.

"No, Sir Henry. I should like to get to the bottom of that one," replied Watkin, still occupied with his papers.

"Ah!" exclaimed the Director dubiously. "By the way, Egerton, the Wares are back in town, I hear. Have you seen anything of them?"

"Not yet," replied Egerton. "But I'm dining with Ware quietly on Thursday, this day week. Lady Ware's not back yet; still in Switzerland, I believe. Poor things! It's been a fearful time for them."

"Of course. I've never met them. I should rather like to."

"Easily manage that. She's a delightful woman—charming, and he's a great character, Hubby Ware. He'd like to know you. Crazy on crime."

"Well, poor devil, he's had his whack in this anyhow," laughed out the Director.

"Yes, by Jove!" continued Egerton. "Most extraordi-

nary thing, you know. Only about half an hour before that boy was drowned, the Wares and I were sitting together, and Hubby Ware was holding forth on crime, devilish funny he was too, telling me he'd been reading some French murder or other. Marvellous chap! Actually enters all the crimes he reads in a book-diary."

"Well, after this I should think he's fairly cured, eh?" replied the Director.

Inspector Watkin closed his bag with a snap.

"You don't want me any more, Sir George?" he asked of the Director.

"No."

The inspector walked out of the room with his customary erectness, and when the door was closed Egerton said:

"Poor old Watkin! The Wilbury case is the blow of his life—a sore point with him. Did you notice how he hurried off? Ha! ha!"

"Yes; well, I'm afraid he'll have to get over it. We never shall unearth that. There's one last resort I want taken, though. A reward of two hundred pounds. Not a bit of good, but I think it ought to be done." And the Director rose to put on his hat.

"You're still certain it was murder then?" asked Egerton.

"On the evidence, yes."

"Yet another of our undiscovered crimes, eh?"

"Ha! I suppose so."

And the two men smiled philosophically as the Director gave the other a lift with his overcoat, and sent crime to the winds.

"Egerton, you must go to the Empire and see this new dancer."

"Good, eh?"

"My dear fellow, she's perfectly charming. I was there last night with the Derek Blands. Delightful! Come and lunch at the Reform."

CHAPTER XVI

THE few weeks in the Upper Engadine air had done wonders for Magdalen. Sleep had returned to her, and her nervous system, so terribly overstrained, had greatly improved. She chose a quaint little nook for her stay. It was quiet she yearned for and avoidance of the public eye. Accordingly she selected the small Morteratsch Restaurant, whose proprietor made a special arrangement to keep open for her. No other visitors were there. It was perfect. Six thousand feet above the sea level, close proximity to the glacier which gave her glorious air day and night, simple food cleanly served, soundless but for the glacier-stream which flowed close by the inn, encircled by great snow mountains, Pitz Palü, Pitz Morteratsch, and Pitz Bernina, which seemed to shut out all the troubles of the world, within an easy *einspanner* drive of the villages round about, and the Bernina Pass, in bed at ten and up at eight, picnic luncheons on the Morteratsch or Rosegg Glaciers with Celia and Marston Gurney; everything different from her usual life—change.

The Gurneys noticed with relief the improvement it brought. They had been anxious about her, and, apart from her general depression and nervousness, had grieved over the frailty which had come into her face. Now all that had gone, and she looked ironed out. The shadows round the eyes and mouth had vanished. She was the same radiantly beautiful creature as ever.

The Gurneys resolved never to speak of Eustace to her, and at first when the English papers continued their allusions to the affair they were carefully kept out of sight. Later, when all mention of it ceased, the three could read the news in peace and be *au courant* with London. But there was one other person who, Celia observed, was never alluded to by Magdalen. That was Michael Adye. This

impressed the girl, because she felt instinctively that she was thinking of him. She also regarded this silence somewhat seriously. It troubled her. And she often wondered whether her friend, who was her ideal, and whose married life provided her with the excuse, would make a mistake. She had tremendous confidence in her ideal; she knew that "it was a character in a thousand"; but, nevertheless, a dread haunted her that she might be tried too far, and that because she was so essentially human she would bend in the fight.

One day near the end of their visit, when the three had finished their sandwiches on the glacier, Marston Gurney left them alone, and took a longer walk on the ice with the guide. Celia opened the English paper and read out to Magdalen the various bits of news. They did not appear to interest her greatly.

"Any parliamentary news?" she asked quietly.

"Oh, the debate on the Navy Estimates."

"Interesting?"

"Usual thing—two keels to one. Oh—!" And Celia stopped.

"Anything wrong?"

"No—no." And the girl read out from the paper a headline—because her mother-wit for once did not work fast enough to conceal the truth—"‘Fighting’ speech by M.A.’"

Magdalen merely closed her eyes for a brief second, and proceeded during the silence which followed to chip up the ice with her alpenstock. Celia pretended to read the paper to herself, but in reality she watched Magdalen intently. There was no mistaking the look which crossed her beautiful face. Her mind was far away from the glacier and its grand mountains. They shut out no troubles from her then. They formed a huge barrier to happiness. They frowned upon her. Her thoughts were whirled back to stern reality. Her full lips became set, and the big grey-blue eyes seemed to see through the great *moraine* close by.

Celia rushed to another topic.

"Oh, they've got a new play at the St. James's," she

said. "Let's see what the notice says. The last one there was topping."

"Give me the paper, will you, dear?" answered Magdalen.

Celia passed it to her, and Magdalen "took a bee-line" for the Navy Estimates, and became absorbed in Adye's speech.

When she had finished it she turned over one page and yet another.

"Where are the law reports?" she asked impatiently. "These wretched papers have become so unwieldy you can't find anything.—Ah, I have it." And Celia, with a glance over her shoulder, observed that Magdalen became engrossed in a libel action in which, wonderful to tell, Michael Adye was appearing for the plaintiff.

Her mind was centred on this one soul who was the love of her life. But she never spoke of him. Nor had she seen him since the day of the tragedy, when he ventured to remind her of her promise to him not to enter into any financial transactions without seeking his advice. Those were his last words to her. At the time of her departure for Switzerland his valuable services in two bye-elections had been sought, and as they were both many miles from London he had found safety in distance again.

When Magdalen had read Adye's speech to the jury at least three times, Gurney returned.

"To-day's Thursday, isn't it?" she asked suddenly. It chanced to be the same day that Egerton was with the Director of Public Prosecutions at Whitehall.

"Yes, Thursday," replied Celia.

"I shall start for London on Monday then."

"So soon?"

"Yes, we've had the best of the weather. It's getting rather cold, I think. And—and I'm ever so much better."

As they walked back to the inn, Gurney preceding them with the guide, Celia determined not to thwart Magdalen in her wish. She said nothing more upon the subject. But Magdalen reverted to it.

"You see," she said, "I must take the plunge some time.

The sooner it's done now the better. And I have to meet Hubert. The whole of our future has to be settled. I can't go on living as I have done. It's impossible. I shall see my solicitor directly I get back."

Eventually they left the ice, and sauntered leisurely in single file along the pathway which led to their quarters. During the walk Celia, try as she might, was unable to dissociate in her mind Magdalen's approaching departure from Michael Adye, while she was irresistibly drawn to the conclusion that her regulation of her future and that of her husband was governed by her love for the K.C. She was aware, of course, that her brother's death had completely altered her financial position, and that there was no longer the question of the wife continuing to live under the same roof with her husband in order to support him. By the sudden change in their circumstances some other arrangement was feasible. But notwithstanding, though Celia despised herself for the suspicion, the girl could not but feel that if Michael Adye was non-existent, the hurry and anxiety for the alteration would not have arisen.

At a bend in the pathway Celia caught her up and stopped her. A tone of hope came into her voice as a possible means of Magdalen's permanent escape entered her mind.

"Magda, are you going to divorce Sir Hubert?"

A hopeless shrug of her shoulders accompanied her answer.

"How can I?"

"I was only wondering—"

"My dear Celia, until Parliament gives effect to the Divorce Commission Report, consistent infidelity is not enough in our splendidly regulated country to enable us women to get a divorce. Besides, if it was, I think I once told you I never could face that horror."

"Then what shall you do, dear?"

"Have a separation arranged by the lawyers—anything!"

"But, Magda, that must mean some publicity—gossip and—"

"Gossip!" she cried. "Isn't there that already about

Eustace? Do you suppose I've escaped gossip? An object of pity with some; of suspicion with others—"

"Suspicion!"

"Yes, suspicion! First me; then Hubert; then both of us!"

"O-h-h!" And the girl's face flushed scarlet as she looked at her.

"Do you imagine, Celia, that either of us is let off? That's the world. It'll twist anything the way it wants, the world will. But I mean to get something out of life if I can, and I must get it *alone* if I'm to live. Isn't that a natural ambition at the age of twenty-five?"

Just then Gurney hurried back to them excitedly with the guide.

"There's a chamois right up on that rock. See him? Against the sky there!"

"Yes," said Magdalen under her breath. "Splendid little fellow. Hup! He's gone. There he goes, see?—springing from rock to rock!"

They all watched the nimble animal with admiration, and Magdalen murmured:

"The freedom of it!"

They returned to the inn, and after tea Magdalen asked Marston Gurney if he would mind writing a line for her to her husband to give the day of their arrival, it being arranged upon Magdalen's entreaty that, for a time at any rate, the Gurneys should stay with her in Bruton Street. She herself also placed her writing-block upon her knee and wrote two letters. She gave them subsequently for the post to Celia, who could not help noticing the envelopes. One was addressed to Michael Adye, and the other to Bragson and Bragson, her solicitors. But since Magdalen made no further allusion to either, it was not for her to do so. However intimate a friendship may be, there are some subjects which must emanate solely from the person concerned. And Celia was far too wise a person to act otherwise. But if she said nothing, she thought much. She was troubled. She dreaded the departure for England on Monday. She had no real, tangible reason for doing so. It was merely

a strong feeling that she had — a fear that something, she could not say what, was going to happen. She was apprehensive. The atmosphere was menacing. The daylight had gone, she imagined, more quickly than usual. There was not the usual sunset for them to wonder at, none of those exquisite colours which transform the sky in the after-glow and make the mountain-tops stand out like cardboard. There was no calm stillness in the air, but in its stead a sly rustle in the trees, which bent to the increasing breeze. Dark grey clouds, too, crept low along the valley, and hid the snow-peaks stealthily. And with the night came a blackness that was impenetrable. Neither the moon nor a star was visible. The girl waited for a storm to burst. She wished that it would do so and get it over. Her feelings might change then. The oppression in the air might go. She might feel happier. Of course, it was only the atmosphere which made her feel wretched. She schooled herself to think so.

When the three sat down to dinner it was evident to the other two that Celia was miles away from the Morteratsch Restaurant.

"You're very *distracte* — to-night," said Magdalen with a smile.

"I know," agreed Gurney. "Just what I was thinking. You're becoming a shocking bad listener, Celia. Here have I been holding forth for the last five minutes on the Labour Unrest, and you haven't heard a word."

"I'm so sorry, Marston. There's a storm brewing, I think, and it makes me feel funny."

She did her best then to take an intelligent interest in the conversation, but at *bésique* afterwards, though she was generally an indifferent card-player, she played worse than usual. Gurney was her partner in a *chouette* against Magdalen, who was "in the chair," and, being more than satisfied with her hand, had crossed the room to fill a pipe. On his return he was horror-stricken.

"But you've played out your fourth knave of diamonds!" he cried. "There's another queen of spades in, and we might have had the *Grand coup*, and with a ru-

bicon too! I say, Celia, of all the rotten performances!"

"I—I'm sorry, dear, but I—I can't keep my mind on it somehow."

At the end of the game she got up and said:

"You go on playing with Magdalen. I'll watch. I'd rather. You settle up for me, Marston." And she walked to the window to look out while the other two continued to play their threepenny points.

But there was no sign of the storm breaking. And the dread still haunted Celia's mind that it was to break in the future. She watched Magdalen from a distance, looking extraordinarily beautiful, and the thought of her with a sullied reputation was torture to her. It did not belong to her. Celia was no prude, but in character as well as in beauty Magdalen was a queen in her eyes. Her love for her old school-fellow was almost idolatrous. She was jealous of her good name, and if Michael Adye or any man should break her, the girl's hatred of him would be fierce indeed. Was that going to happen? Would he, could he, take advantage of her present unhappiness, and try to make her—commonplace? Or would she be strong enough to support the burden she had to carry? This was the conflict in Celia's mind. And although she was one of those human souls who would hold out two helping hands to any woman who was down, and utter a good, clean oath to anyone who questioned her action, yet her upbringing in a wholesome country rectory had left its mark upon her, and made her venerate the woman who could resist. She could back her horse, as we know. She was fond of her game of cards, but not for love. She would have "five bob" on a game of golf, or on the weather if there was nothing else to bet about. But she was as "straight as a die." Marston Gurney was rather a lucky fellow.

All these thoughts Celia kept to herself. Her husband did not share them. And for the time being, however great her anxiety, she resolved not to utter them to Magdalen. She would have given the world, however, that night to know what she had written to Michael Adye.

The *bésique* was over, and bedtime had come. Gurney

handed Magdalen the fifty francs he had lost to her, and strolled out to look at the night.

"You've done well, dear," said Celia to Magdalen.

"Yes, great cards. Only three more nights here, Celia." And there was a note of cheerfulness in the voice.

"That's all. I'm sorry it's over — very."

Magdalen was about to continue, and stopped herself suddenly.

"You were going to say something?" asked Celia eagerly, who saw that some thought had struck her.

"N-o-o. Er — nothing more seems to be said about poor Eustace. I hope they'll leave us all alone now."

Her tone was a fervent one. The two went upstairs to bed. Celia had hoped that it was of Michael Adye that Magdalen was going to speak.

CHAPTER XVII

THE Monday came and went. The journey to England had been accomplished comfortably, and the party of three had reached Bruton Street on the Wednesday evening. Sir Hubert was out when they arrived, playing Bridge at his club. The first thing Magdalen did when Rate opened the front door was to go to the hall-table and look eagerly at a pile of letters which awaited her. She took them in her hand and replaced one after another carelessly as she examined the envelopes, until her eyes fell upon a particular handwriting. Celia noticed immediately that she had found what she was expecting. Magdalen opened the letter quickly and read it through, but her expression was unreadable while she did so. She merely turned to Rate calmly and said:

"Mr. Adye will be dining to-morrow."

"Very well, my lady. Sir Hubert has invited Sir Henry Egerton, my lady, so that will make six altogether, my lady."

A shadow immediately crossed her face, and that of Celia and Gurney as well. All three were thinking the same—that no sooner did Magdalen cross the threshold of her house than every memory of the Wilbury tragedy was to be revived. Few people go for a restful holiday without being quickly harassed on their return, but this annoyance was exceptionally impatient of a hearing. To have to meet Sir Henry the very day after her arrival was certainly trying to Magdalen. He was intimately associated with the disaster, and, of course, he was very different from Michael Adye. Magdalen, to put it mildly, thought it tactless of her husband to invite him; but upon that point, after a discreet question to the butler, her mind was set at rest. Rate informed her that Sir Hubert told him a week ago that Egerton was coming to dine upon the Thursday. And

at that time Magdalen had not announced the date of her return.

Holding Adye's letter in her hand, she instructed Rate to have all the rest taken up to her room, and after a sympathetic inquiry as to Mrs. Rate's health, which the butler solemnly informed her was "as good as could be expected," she went upstairs for a short rest before dressing for dinner.

Gurney opened a letter of his own, and turned to Celia. "I've got a letter from Adye, too," he said.

"What about?"

"Don't know. But he wants me to look him up at the Temple to-morrow afternoon. I didn't say anything to you at the time, but to tell you the truth, I wrote to him from the Engadine after it was arranged for us to come on here with Lady Ware."

"But why?"

"Well, I felt restless, as I feel now, about myself. This is a rotten position I'm filling—sort of secretary to Lady Ware. I can't 'stick it,' Celia, any longer. A chap of my age ought to try to do something better. It isn't fair to you, and I feel all out of conceit with myself. I wouldn't have gone abroad, only at that time I didn't think it would be cricket to leave her in the lurch. So I wrote straight to Adye to ask if he could possibly get me a job, or advise me. I knew he'd give me the best advice of any one. So I suppose this is what he wants to see me about. A grand fellow, Adye."

A footman came to Gurney for his keys, and he and his wife went to dress.

Meanwhile Rate was bombarded with questions by his inferiors concerning Lady Ware.

"'Ow does she look, Mr. Rate?"

"Got 'er colour back, Mr. Rate?"

"Is she all in black, still?"

"Not a bit 'o white anywhere?"

"That can't suit 'er, can it?"

"No-o-o. A bit o' white's necessary ~~like~~ against the skin, I say."

"'As she got over it, Mr. Rate?"

"Is she quite 'erself like, Mr. Rate?"

"Her ladyship is unfeelingly like herself," replied the butler at his full six feet.

"Ah, I knew she'd get over it quick. No love lost there, there wasn't."

Richardson, the maid, was in her turn asked what she thought of the "Hengerdine," but she expressed her disappointment with the place:

"Nothing but mountains and nature. So dull. Not a single cinematograph show anywhere."

Marston Gurney came down presently to the library, and scribbled an answer to Michael Adye to say that he would be with him at his chambers to-morrow afternoon. He placed his letter for the post upon the hall-table. While he did so the latchkey turned in the front door, and Sir Hubert Ware appeared.

"Hullo, my dear Marston, how are you?" and he shook his hand warmly.

There was no need for Gurney to inquire after his health. He was looking remarkably well, as handsome as ever, and with all his old spirits recovered.

"Come into my den a moment before I dress and tell me your news," he continued. "It's good to see your old mug again."

Gurney followed him into the library and behaved perfectly. While away in Switzerland Celia had confided to him Ware's treatment of Magdalen, and it had shocked him. He found it difficult to reconcile it with the delightful manner he had invariably extended to him, and the misery of it made the young fellow more anxious than ever to find some other occupation. But he was no fool, and whatever his inward resentment might be, it was not his business to interfere or to pretend to know anything. Moreover, he nursed the youthful hope that the tragedy through which the two had passed might conceivably be the cause of reunion.

"Er — how does my wife seem, Marston?"

"Ever so much better. Celia and I were anxious about

her at first, very, but gradually the air and the change did their work, and during the last few days she's come along like anything."

"Good."

"And you, Sir Hubert? You look well."

"Fit as possible. For the first few days it was pretty trying—this horrible thing in the papers day after day, you know. But all that's over now."

"And I suppose they've let the matter drop?"

"Oh, must have. It was too ridiculous."

"Too damned cruel for Lady Ware their bringing in that rotten verdict. I wish Tower Hill still existed."

"I know. Still, there it was. And I suppose the police felt after that that they had to ferret about a bit. Rate's wife wrote him a few weeks back that that champion idiot, Inspector Watkin, had prowled about the premises on one occasion, but he's not been again. I'm only surprised he didn't arrest Mrs. Rate." And he laughed heartily. "Poor old Rate! He'd have looked more corpse-like than ever—what! Picture his vocabulary; eh?"

"By the way, Sir Hubert, I may as well tell you that with Lady Ware we've avoided the subject altogether."

"And she hasn't spoken of it?"

"No."

"I see." There was a pause, and then Ware continued somewhat diffidently: "Of course the shock was horrible at the time, but it would be affectation to pretend that poor Eustace's death hasn't altered things completely. I can't play the humbug about that." He looked at Gurney steadily and proceeded: "Weird as it may seem to you, Marston, I haven't got a debt in the world."

"But—"

"My wife has settled everything."

"She's paid them all?" There was admiration in Gurney's voice.

"Every bob. At least, her solicitors are fixing things up under her directions."

"By God, she's fine!"

"Yes," replied Ware slowly. "Marston, it's perhaps a

queer thing to talk about, but, though we haven't inflicted it on other people, my wife and I haven't hit it off very well."

Gurney regarded him a little awkwardly, but did not speak.

"Well, no," continued Ware. "Incompatibility of something or other. I don't know. But there it is. Perhaps now, though, things may mend a bit and —"

"Oh, I hope so," said the young fellow under his breath.

"You'll stay on with me as my Chancellor of the Exchequer, Marston?"

"Well, I'm afraid not, Sir Hubert. I feel I ought —"

"To be doing something better? Well, perhaps you're right. Young man. Ambition and all that. Splendid fellow! But you're not going to rush away from us at once, eh?"

"Well, not for a week or two. Lady Ware pressed us to stay, and —"

"Good boy! We'll make the best of the time we can. Of course we can't go out much yet, but a harmless round or two of golf can't hurt anybody. I'm rather on my game at present. Look here, old man, I'm playing to-morrow with Charlie Winkworth at Sunningdale, catching the early train. Join us and make it a three-ball. He won't mind. He can have his fiver on the match with me just the same. Do."

"I'm afraid I can't. Thanks very much. I have an appointment with Michael Adye."

"Oh, really?"

"Yes. He once told me to go to him if I wanted advice. So I'm going."

"And you'll find him keep his word. He's a nailer."

Ware knew what he was talking about. He looked at his watch, and crossed to the door with a light step.

"By the way, Marston, I've got Egerton dining with us to-morrow. I've not seen him since —"

"Yes, I know, but don't you think it may bring it all back to Lady Ware?"

"Oh, a friend like Egerton. Besides, the plunge has to be taken some time. Get it over, I say."

"Adye's coming too, Sir Hubert."

"Adye is? Good! My wife asked him, I suppose. Capital! A bottle of Clicquot '99 and a mild rubber afterwards, eh? By Jove! I'm in a vein of luck just now. Tremendous cards this afternoon at the club."

He left the room with the elasticity of a boy, and Gurney thought that he had never seen him in better form. He rather liked him, too, for his candour over Eustace's death. Many men, he thought, would play the hypocrite. Of course, to be in the dire financial extremity that he was in, and then to find suddenly that he was out of it. The relief must have been indescribable. No wonder he had recovered his spirits. But after Celia's revelations to him about Magdalen's unhappiness he could not help thinking what a lucky devil Ware was to have such a wife to do what she had done for him, nor hoping earnestly that in some way the past might be wiped out, and that there might be still something of a life for both of them.

Neither he nor Celia saw the short meeting between the Wares, but the evening passed off outwardly quite pleasantly.

The next morning early Ware went off to his golf before the letters were taken up. He did not see his wife before he started. She came down later to breakfast with Celia and Gurney, and it was plain that already something had occurred to distress her. She was markedly preoccupied at the table.

Afterwards, when she was alone with Celia, she said:

"You don't mind looking after yourself, dear, do you? I have to go to Bragsons, my solicitors."

"Any worry, Magda?"

"I've had a letter from them which has upset me rather. Oh, I daresay I can bring myself to tell you about it some time."

In her gesture which accompanied the words there was a wealth of indignation. Later in the day she returned to Bruton Street, but she remained alone in her room during

most of the forenoon, until she began to dress early for the dinner at which Adye and Egerton were expected. Would she be called very inhuman if upon that occasion she did her hair and chose her gown with a little more care than usual?

Certainly she would be censured by some. But they might safely be placed in the category of negligible quantities, or classified with those who spend their lives in intolerant hyper-criticism of their fellow-creatures while possessing a capacity for perpetrating far worse delinquencies themselves. Anyhow, she did dress carefully, and was some minutes behind Celia, who was sitting alone in the morning-room, neither Marston Gurney nor Ware having yet returned, the one from his visit to Michael Adye and the other from his golf.

It was a charming white room upon the entrance floor in which the girl was sitting. A pair of exceedingly handsome mahogany doors with choice mouldings opened to the oak hall, and the only other door in the room led straight into the dining-room. A very pretty bow-shaped window had been constructed. It projected outwards not far short of the area railings. Some people declared that it was a flagrant temptation to burglars; but Magdalén was one of those who maintained, rightly or wrongly, that if a burglar means to get in, he will do it no matter what obstacles he encounters. The furniture was in harmony with its frame, and consisted of some fine specimens of the Louis XV. period. Among them a graceful grandfather clock of French design was a prize possession. Beautiful pictures, exquisitely framed, adorned the walls, the scheme of electric lighting was perfect, a gorgeous chandelier of old cut crystal from the ceiling lending a striking finish to the room, which, although it chiefly contained valuable *objets d'art*, was not devoid of one or two of those inexpensive articles which, left about untidily, give that lived-in appearance to a house and make it habitable. She had only been home twenty-four hours, but you felt that the room belonged to Magdalén. It spelt wealth, but it was really comfortable. And Celia was warming her toes at the blazing fire one'mo-

ment, and strumming prettily upon a lovely piano the next, while still she was speculating upon the outcome of Michael Adye's approaching meeting with Magdalen and harbouring her fears. Since that night in the Engadine she never had been able to shake them off.

Before long, however, the folding doors opened and Marston Gurney came into the room in day attire. He greeted his young wife with an affectionate kiss, which she reciprocated, though she pointed out to him that he was "awfully late."

"Sorry, Celia, but after I left Adye I looked in at the club for a bit, and I wish I hadn't."

"Why?"

"In the evening paper there I saw they won't let Eustace alone. They're offering two hundred pounds reward to any one who can give information leading to the arrest of his supposed murderer."

Celia uttered an indignant cry.

"Blackguardly, I call it," continued Gurney. "I'm afraid it'll distress Lady Ware awfully. It's the crass stupidity of it that maddens me."

"It's cruel," exclaimed Celia. "Directly she gets back too!"

"And such a woman! Do you know she's paid every single one of Sir Hubert's debts?"

"No!"

"A fact. Isn't she fine?"

"That's just like her, the darling."

"Yes, that's what I said this afternoon to Adye, only in different words."

"And what did he say?" asked Celia, hiding her feeling of anxiety.

"Why, he agreed, of course. What man alive wouldn't? He said she was the finest character he'd ever met."

The girl hesitated for a moment, and then continued:

"And, er — what about yourself and Mr. Adye, Marston?"

Gurney took her by the shoulders excitedly.

"Ah, I have a piece of news for you. Tremendous! I'm going to strike out for myself. I am, by Jove!

"But how, dear? Tell me."

"Well, I told him I wanted to be at something better. See? In fact, I said I was getting desperate. And I am desperate —"

At that moment Magdalen, now dressed for dinner, came in from the hall and caught Gurney's last word.

"Desperate again, Marston?" she said mischievously, as she came to the fire. "No more 'Aeroplanes,' I hope?"

"No, no," replied Gurney laughingly. "I've done with that."

"Yes, we've permanently retired from the turf," joined in Celia with enormous dignity.

"Joking apart, though," continued Gurney, "I've registered an oath never to make another bet."

"Oh, have you? I've heard that tale before." And Magdalen laughed sceptically.

"I've made my pile, you see, Lady Ware."

"So have I," joined in Celia with great pride.

"And it's safe, by Jove!" went on Gurney enthusiastically. "The ring can't get it back in this case. I've invested every penny of the ten thousand, and settled it on Celia. She also can't touch it without the consent of trustees. I've approved the deed this very day."

Magdalen took both his hands in hers and shook them warmly.

"You're an absolute brick," she said.

"He's a genius," exclaimed Celia.

"And when I tell you, Lady Ware, that Michael Adye is one of the trustees, you'll have an easy mind, I know."

"Michael!" whispered Magdalen.

"Yes. And that leads me to something else. I've been telling Celia we must make our plans now for a roof of our own."

Magdalen's face fell, while the young fellow continued:

"You see, Lady Ware, I've done the er—very little I can do for you, and I want to try to go ahead now a bit on my own. I—I'm sure you'll understand—"

"Of course, Marston, you're right — as right as can be, but — but I daren't think what — what this house will be like without you and Celia."

"But we shall often be here," protested the girl gently.

"Yes, dear, I know. That's so different, though. But there, I'm being as selfish as I possibly could be."

"You see," continued Gurney, "I can manage now to afford to wait for a practice at the Bar —"

"At the Bar!" exclaimed Celia excitedly.

"Yes, and Adye's going to be awfully kind —"

"How?" inquired Magdalen, looking at him quickly.

"Well, I've seen him to-day at the Temple, and he's fixed it all up with his brother. His brother is going to take me into his chambers."

Celia waved her handkerchief with delight.

"How good of him!" said Magdalen.

"Ah, he's a nailer. The brother, you know, has a very big Common Law practice. I shall see his work and all that sort of thing. And Michael Adye has asked him to look after me."

"I'm awfully glad, Marston," said Magdalen earnestly. "You'll get on splendidly, I'm certain."

"Well, with Adye's help I shall get the chance anyhow. I'll tell you what he said, Celia. He said, 'My dear chap, I'll do everything I can for you, not only for your own sake, but for your charming little wife's sake as well.' And he sent his love to you, Celia."

Magdalen regarded him somewhat anxiously.

"Er — Michael's not forgot he's dining with us to-night, I hope."

"Oh, no, rather not. He was going home to Carlos Place to dress directly he'd got through his work. By Jove! I must hurry into my things too."

He approached the folding doors, and turned as he opened them.

"No one but Adye and Egerton coming, is there?"

"That's all," answered Magdalen. "It's — it's the first time we shall have met since —"

There was a pause, and Magdalen's gaze wandered round

the room uneasily. She then raised her voice as Gurney was passing out into the hall:

"Marston, you might turn up this centre light. The switch is just outside. It's rather gloomy in here."

Gurney closed the doors after him, and the beautiful old cut-glass chandelier was lit up, and gave a warm glow to the room.

Magdalen approached the doors, and Celia detected, she thought, an excited restlessness in her movements.

"This is splendid news about Marston," she said. "I'm so glad."

"Yes, isn't it?" replied Celia. "It only has one awful side to it."

Magdalen came to her and asked:

"What's that?"

"It means our leaving you. I—I can't bear that thought."

Magdalen took hold of her chin, and looked at her with a smile.

"You're a great dear. But it's right — just as it should be."

And she sat down thoughtfully on a sofa.

"But how sweet of Mr. Adye to take such an interest!" said Celia.

"Yes. He took a great fancy to you both down at Wilbury — at that awful time. And—and then he knew I was anxious about your future, and—"

She broke off suddenly, and looked out in front of her with that strange, wistful expression which was so familiar to Celia.

The girl regarded her for some moments, and then sat down beside her, taking one of her hands in hers.

"What is it, Magda?"

"Nothing—nothing." And Magdalen's voice sank to a whisper.

"Yes, there is something. Tell me, won't you?"

"Nothing that's new, Celia. It's as old as the hills with me."

"Do tell me."

Magdalen stiffened her body as she sat forward and raised her voice.

"Michael. At every turn I seem to meet him connected in some way with my life—if not with mine directly, with someone else's I care for. It's always an action of kindness, of sympathy, of affection. And try as I may to take it all for granted, I utterly fail to do so. Oh, yes, I do. Every single resolution I make totters to the ground. And I find myself weakening—drifting."

"Magda!"

"Yes, yes, yes,—seeking his advice first in one thing, then in another, till I'm face to face with the fact that I'm making excuses for seeking it—in everything—yes, in everything, Celia! I'm finding him indispensable!" She spoke with a vehemence which Celia had not heard before. And the girl was alarmed. Every thought she had in Switzerland rushed in upon her again. She felt then that she had cause for fear. Now she knew it. Her forebodings were correct. There was a real danger. She would try to make her friend avoid it if she could. But was it possible for her to succeed? She turned towards Magdalen.

"But you don't know what you're saying," she protested stoutly.

Magdalen lowered her voice to a calm level and said:

"He loves me, and I know it. I love him, and he knows it."

"Magda!"

"Oh, he's told me nothing in words, nor I him. We neither of us need do that. But it's there—there! If he keeps away from me I know the reason. If I avoid him he guesses why, as I suppose he guesses my object in asking him here to-night. I wrote from Switzerland."

"Why have you asked him—why?"

An evident determination had seized hold of the beautiful woman. There was no shaking her from that.

"Because two months have passed without my seeing him, and I've found them long. There's my open, frank

confession, which I would make to no other living creature in the world."

"Not — to him?" asked Celia anxiously.

"I've not lost my head — yet. I've only lost my heart."

She rose from the sofa and went over to the fire.

"Wouldn't it, then, be wiser," continued the girl, "if you and he —?"

"Never met? 'Out of sight out of — ?' An exploded notion that, my dear."

Celia tried another tack.

"I'm not so sure," she said lightly. "I know when I didn't see Marston I wasn't nearly so helpless as when I did."

"Ah, Celia, your story's very different from mine. It always had a happy ending at your command. Mine's one that —"

"Must never have an end, Magda," said Celia passionately.

"Yet ninety-nine women out of a hundred, placed as I am, would —"

"Yes, but there's the one remaining one who wouldn't. And you are that one!"

"What would you do if I did?" asked Magdalen very quietly.

"I?"

"Yes."

"I should be very sorry."

There was a pause of some moments.

"Disappointed?" and Magdalen put the question in a still lower tone.

"Very, Magda," replied Celia with an effort.

"And join the rest of my friends in cutting me?"

"That's not very kind of you."

"I only ask the question."

"Which you oughtn't to ask me. You know perfectly well that *nothing* you did could ever change me towards you — *nothing*. But I should feel the blows that others dealt you — terribly."

The girl felt deeply every word she said. The carpet

was quite blurred as she looked down at it, and there was a lift of her shoulder which showed clearly to Magdalen that she was struggling hard to master some of her emotion. Celia loved her even more than she had dreamed of. She walked quietly behind the sofa on which the little taut body was sitting and bent down towards her, taking her head in her hands and kissing her lovingly.

"Don't—don't be afraid, Celia," she said. "I shan't give them the chance of dealing their blows." She then drew herself up bravely. "I'm all right. I shan't yield."

Celia looked up at her with her eyes full of tears.

"Be the excuse ever so mighty?" she asked with a smile.

And Magda re-echoed the words confidently:

"Be the excuse ever so mighty; and if you knew what I'd been through to-day at Bragsons' office you'd think I had it with a vengeance."

One of the footmen then entered the room, and laid the evening papers upon the table carefully. And by way of natural conversation in the presence of a servant, who is never deceived, Celia said:

"Magda, you must read the book I got to-day."

"What is it? Somebody's Reminiscences?"

And Magdalen sat down at the piano.

"How did you know?" asked Celia.

"Because it rains Reminiscences."

"I think, though, I prefer fiction—imagination," continued the girl.

"Imagination, my dear, is the hall-mark of Reminiscences."

By this time the footman, as an excuse to remain, had poked the fire, and observing Celia seat herself with the evening paper, and Magdalen playing a Nocturne by Chopin, realized that he was to be deprived of any tit-bit for the servants' hall, and retired with his customary stiffness.

Upon the closing of the door Celia frowned perceptibly as she read her paper, and Magdalen stopped playing in the middle of a bar.

"What's the matter, Celia?"

"Oh — er — nothing."

"Yes there is. What is it?"

And she hurried anxiously to the girl's side, who, seeing that there was no escape from it, told the truth.

"There's something in the paper — about poor Eustace," she whispered.

"What?" Magdalen took the paper from the girl and read out the commencement of a paragraph: "The police offer a reward of two hundred pounds to any one able to —"

"Oh-h!" she cried violently. "It's unending, this horror! Why, in heaven's name, can't they let it rest? Why can't they spare *us*? They never can discover anything now, even if there was anything to discover. And time has proved more and more the cruelty of that verdict. It was wicked — monstrous!"

"It was very cruel to you, dear."

"I think it was rather cruel," answered Magdalen with scorn, "but the world seldom thinks of the living."

CHAPTER XVIII

MAGDALEN flung the paper aside and seated herself in the corner of a sofa by the fireplace. Her foot tapped the ground impatiently, and her brows were puckered with anger. Celia felt that words were useless, and sat down thoughtfully in a chair not far from her, when Ware in his golfing clothes entered from the hall.

"Ah, you've dressed early," he said in his gayest tone. "Well, we've had a grand day. Charlie Winkworth was in great form, but I was in better. A couple of rounds, a fiver on each, and I won both. Do you know, at the sixteenth I made the shot of my life! I'd hooked my drive into the rough and —"

He stopped upon noticing Magdalen's troubled look, and turned to Celia.

"Am I — er — in the way? Anything wrong?"

"Magdalen is distressed, Sir Hubert, at something in to-night's paper about Eustace."

"Ah, yes, this reward," he replied gently. "I saw it in the train. I'm sorry — very."

"Something must be done to end this," said Magdalen determinedly.

"Yes, but what?"

"I don't know," she answered distractedly, as she rose to her feet and paced the room, "and I don't care, but something must be done — anything. It's unendurable, this. Aren't we ever to be allowed to live like ordinary private individuals? Nothing but this everlasting — publicity — publicity."

Her outburst was cut short by Rate, who came in through the dining-room door.

"The flowers have just come from Wilbury, my lady. Does your ladyship wish them to be arranged on the dinner-table?"

"Oh, yes, yes, on the dinner-table," she answered testily.

"I beg your pardon, my lady, but I've also received a letter from my wife enclosed with the flowers. She tells me, my lady, that the police was at Wilbury yesterday draggin' the lake again."

Magdalen uttered an exclamation of horror, and Celia hastened to her side.

"Again?" asked Ware.

"Yes, Sir Hubert."

"But what for?"

"It's only the police that can tell that, Sir Hubert. I don't think they know themselves, Sir Hubert. That's what the wife says in her letter, addin' in a postscript: 'The police is baffled, and when the police is baffled, the police is baffled.'"

"But is your wife sure they were the police?" asked Ware.

"Quite sure, Sir Hubert. If it had been a mere country rumour I should have paid no attention to it, Sir Hubert. But when the wife's reliable, which she frequently is, I attach considerable importance to her conversation. She spoke with the police, Sir Hubert. Inspector Watkin himself conducted the operations."

"And I suppose, as usual, made a general mess of things and discovered nothing?"

"The wife swears to 'is reticence, Sir Hubert. He went into the house too, Sir Hubert."

"This is outrageous," cried Magdalen.

"Ah, but I gave him permission, I remember now, before I left," explained Ware.

"Then it was a great mistake to do so," she replied.

"Are we to be denied all privacy by these people?"

"But what object could Inspector Watkin have in going into the house?" asked Ware.

"I don't suppose he knew 'imself, Sir Hubert. But he went from room to room, looking round with one of 'is men. But the wife stuck close to 'em, which the wife was quick enough to see they didn't want, until they reached the library. There, however, she had to leave them, Sir Hubert, and they remained some time alone."

"In the library?" asked Ware perplexedly.

"But the wife felt quite comfortable about that, Sir Hubert, as all the cigars 'ad been removed."

"That will do, Rate," said Magdalen.

There was finality in her tone, and the butler retreated to the dining-room.

"I tell you, this must end," she continued. "It's persecution. I shall—!"

"Still, they have to do their duty, I suppose," urged Ware quietly.

"Their duty! If there was any sense in it, perhaps so, and one would be glad to give them every help, though whatever we did never could alter the horrible tragedy of it all. But when one knows they are going on simply because of that iniquitous verdict, it's unbearable."

"You know, I hope, Magdalen, how deeply I've sympathized with your feelings all through this. But there's one person we owe it all to."

"Who's that?"

"Paterson. It all came from your insistence to overlook that brawling of his once in the village when he was had up before the bench. If we had got rid of the fellow then, we should have been spared all this. He never could have given that ridiculous evidence about seeing a man bending over a punt half a mile off. And really, I can't believe the doctor's evidence could have settled it alone."

"But there it is, and we can't get away from it," exclaimed Magdalen excitedly. "I'm glad now you asked Sir Henry Egerton to dine to-night. Directly he arrives I shall beg him to do all he can to prevent this going on."

The telephone upon the writing-table rang, and Ware went to answer the call while Magdalen took Celia by the arm, and whispered to her fearfully:

"That's from Michael to say he can't come. I—I'm certain of it."

She waited anxiously while her husband spoke into the instrument: "Halloa?—Is anyone there?—Yes, yes, what number do you want? Yes, you're on the right one. This is Sir Hubert Ware's house—it's Sir Hubert Ware speaking."

Magdalen was too impatient to wait any longer.

"Is it from Michael," she asked, "to say he can't come?"

"No — no," answered Ware in a whisper, as he continued to hold the receiver to his ear. After a short pause, during which he listened, he again spoke into the telephone: "I see, yes — I'm very sorry, but I quite understand. I'll explain to Lady Ware. Good-bye."

He then hung up the receiver and turned to his wife.

"It's a clerk or somebody from Egerton's office at Scotland Yard to say he's stopped by urgent business from dining with us."

"It's a little late to tell us that, I think," said Magdalen.

"Yes; but it appeared Egerton had given instructions for a telephone message to be sent to you earlier. Some blunderer had overlooked it. I'm sorry, though. I should have liked to see him."

Magdalen turned to Celia quietly.

"Would you mind telling Rate for me?" she said.

Then when Ware's back was turned she made a gesture which showed Celia that she wished to be alone with her husband. Accordingly the girl went out by the door into the dining-room, and closed it behind her. The two were now left alone, and there was an awkward silence between them. There was no need for pretence of any kind. No part had to be acted. Nobody else was there. Magdalen sat down in a chair quietly, but there was great determination written upon her face. She was completely self-possessed, and she wore the look of one who was about to take a step beyond recall.

Ware stood with his knickerbockered legs wide apart, and took out his watch. He turned the winder several times in silence, and his head was to some extent thrust forward as he stared at the exquisite carpet beneath him. There the two remained for some seconds without the utterance of a word; the one a young woman of surpassing beauty and elegance, the other a man in the early thirties, remarkably handsome and attractive, wife and husband close together, yet with a hemisphere between them.

"Well, I suppose I must go and dress," he said at length.

"Not for a moment," she replied very quietly. "I have something to say to you, Hubert."

"Will it take long? I can get into my things in ten minutes, but Adye will probably be punctual."

"I can be as brief as you wish."

"Oh, I don't want to bustle you, Magda, and you know what a pleasure it always is to hear your voice—"

"I'm afraid that tone is a little out of tune with what I have to say. I merely wish to tell you of a determination I've come to."

There was an exceptional levelness in her voice. It showed distinctly that she meant every word she said. Ware felt it to be deadly.

"Sounds portentously serious," he said airily.

"I have decided that you and I must live apart."

"I was under the impression we had to come to that understanding in the now almost dim and distant past."

"I mean under separate roofs, and for good and all."

"But why?" And there was a note of misgiving in his question.

"Because it would be happier for both of us. At any rate, it would be happier for me."

"But what—?"

"Oh, you have nothing to fear as regards money. A regular income in keeping with your position is to be provided for you out of my capital. And there will be only one necessary condition."

"And that is?"

"That you don't exceed it. I shall do no more than I agree to do. I have arranged about the deed to-day."

"And the—amount of the income, Magdalen?"

"I prefer for the moment not to name. With my lack of knowledge in such matters I might understate it or overstate it. In any event, I've not acted ungenerously towards you. In fact, I've tried to err in the other direction."

"And—the capital?"

"Will be safely protected as to be impossible—"

"For me to touch?"

"Precisely."

She rose from her chair, and with all her natural dignity walked to the fire. His eyes followed her anxiously, but he did not stir. She had not spoken in anger. Every word was uttered deliberately. Every word was final.

"Magdalen, why this sudden decision?" The question was put regretfully.

"Sudden!" she exclaimed tearfully. "Sudden! Do you think it's sudden? Why, over and over again I've battled with the intention to leave you; and in the end, like a weak fool, have borne any treatment you've chosen to insult me with. I've endured it, and suffered it, and — bent under it for three years. Yes, three years. Three years hacked out of my life! Nothing, absolutely nothing to a man, no doubt, but to a young woman — priceless. I'm only twenty-five. You forgot that, I dare say. So do I sometimes."

There was a depth of feeling in the last four words, but she mastered it, and continued to plead her cause.

"Of course, I ought not to have submitted for a moment when I first found you out. I see that now clearly enough. It's as plain to me as anything could possibly be. But you know why I did. It was what thousands of women in the same plight would have done. It was little Philip alone who made me stay."

"Philip!" murmured Ware almost inaudibly.

"Yes. A mother is easily held captive by her child."

"But, Magdalen," continued Ware quietly, "after he died you —"

"Remained on? I know that. What did it matter to me at such a time whether I went or whether I stayed? *Nothing* mattered then. Each day dragged by like the one before, without a streak of light in it, and the tale of your faithlessness to me became monotonous and expected. I — I got used to it; so used to it that it needed something new to — to bring me to life again. That happened two months ago when your ruin came — a ruin brought about by the utter worthlessness of your life, a ruin without a shadow of an excuse, undeserving of a shred of pity."

"I'm not defending it," said the man helplessly.

"Even then, though — even then I decided to stay with

you because, if you'll remember, it was practically vital to your very existence that I should. I told you so, and you agreed. It was on the very day poor Eustace was drowned. Perhaps that will bring it to your mind."

"I—I remember."

"But from the moment of his death everything was changed. That awful thing altered my position completely. You may quarrel with the final decision I've come to, Hubert. But in that case you force me literally to remind you that at any rate I've—I've not acted ungenerously towards you."

Her voice shook as she had herself to speak of her own good actions; but he merely hung his head in silence.

"*Must* I explain how?" she continued. "I—I've paid every debt you incurred. I've met every single one of your creditors in full. I've provided for other women whose lives you've wrecked as well as mine."

"For others?"

"Yes, others," she cried vehemently. "I've shut their mouths with hush-money! Only this very day I was dragged to Bragson and Bragson to settle the last case. They told me it was blackmail like the rest, and I agreed to pay. It took some doing, but I set my teeth and went through with it somehow, and screened you. But that was the last straw, decided me in my mind. Further I can't go. I—I—I don't think I've treated you unfairly."

The tortured woman broke down utterly, and tears of grief, regret, humiliation rushed to her aid.

"I'm not going to try to dispute that," said Ware warmly. "You—you've behaved damned finely!"

A silence followed, and as he looked at her drying her eyes he said suddenly:

"Look here, Magdalen, can't we start afresh?"

"No," she whispered, "it's too late for that."

"Of course," he went on, "with two well-known people like us, if we separate there's bound to be gossip—publicity and all that."

"Publicity! Can there be more than we have to bear now?"

"You mean — ?"

"This terrible end of Eustace. Can we ever get away from it? Never, it seems to me."

"It's awful, of course, but time, you know —"

"Time! Time! It's two months now, and just as one thought the horror of it all was passing, out it bursts again to haunt one!"

"Ah, well, perhaps after this reward there will be an end of it."

"It will never end!"

She rose from her chair, and again paced the room restlessly.

Ware waited until she came close to his side.

"On the face of it, then," he said, "isn't this a time when, if we both did our best, we might help each other? Can't we start afresh, Magda, you and I? Can't I try to make amends for — what's gone before? Can't we patch it up — pick up the broken pieces?"

She looked at him steadily and said:

"The broken pieces are strewn everywhere. Some are lost for good. Others are beyond repair."

A long silence followed, which at length was broken by a loud knock upon the front door. Both of them heard it, and Ware hurried to the window, and looked out from behind the blind. "Michael," he said as he returned to her. "He's before his time, confound it!" But Magdalen was glad. "You've never spoken so determinedly before, Magdalen," continued Ware hurriedly.

"I've never felt so determined. I—I don't want to be cruel, but all sympathy between us is dead, and it would take far more than words from you to revive it."

"What could I do to revive it?" he cried.

"You could do nothing. It would need a great something from outside to bring that about."

The handle of the folding doors turned, and Rate advanced into the room to make his announcement:

"Mr. Adye."

CHAPTER XIX

MICHAEL ADYE came in in his customary easy way. Ware was not far from the doors when he entered, and greeted him first. Abye then approached the fire and took Magdalen's hand warmly in his. The lack of words on her part was compensated by Ware's volubility.

"Well, how are you, Abye?"

"Fairly fit, thanks, except for the east wind and an English November," answered the K.C., who then turned towards his hostess. "I'm becoming painfully conscious of it, Magdalen. Ha! ha!"

"What nonsense!" she exclaimed with a laugh, while she seated herself upon a settee by the fire.

"I don't believe you," said Ware.

"Word of honour. Why, if I have to cross-examine a witness when the wind's in the west I'm a perfect lamb with him; but if it's in the east I give him hell."

The Wares laughed with him, and it would have taken an uncommonly keen observer to imagine that that husband and wife but a moment before had passed through an interview which had settled finally, irrevocably, their future existence. Abye, indeed, was thinking how perfect Magdalen was looking, and how well she seemed after all she had gone through. Even a question was rushing through his brain: "Are these two people happier together than they have been? Has the misery they've endured formed an olive branch?"

"Well, I'll go and get these things off," said Ware. "Shan't be more than ten minutes."

"Been playing golf, eh?" said Abye. "What luck some people have! There have I been stuck in court all day."

"Oh, one moment, Hubert," interrupted Magdalen. "You could tell me this. That transfer Michael witnessed for me down at Wilbury—"

Ware halted suddenly by the doors which he had opened,

and Adye passed his hand casually across his face to hide his surprise.

"The dividend is paid, I believe, in January, isn't it?" she asked.

"Er—yes, in January," replied Ware.

"Well, it will appear in my book as something different, won't it?"

"How do you mean?" asked Adye, with a face like a mask.

"Well, the thing was changed, wasn't it? But I can't remember exactly whether it was from Great Western Debentures to Great Western Ordinary, or the other way about. I'm such an idiot at these things, and all the financial transactions I've been bothered with since—since poor Eustace's death have muddled me dreadfully. Which was it?"

Adye seized the difficulty at once. He remembered faithfully his promise to Ware never to tell his wife. He knew equally well that no transfer had occurred. There was only one thing, therefore, to do to save the situation. He had to lie.

"I can remember," he said calmly, while Ware hung upon his words. "It was from Ordinary to Debentures, wasn't it, Ware?"

"Yes, certainly," was Ware's answer, which he gave with his back turned to the others."

"The dividend will be larger, won't it?" asked Magdalen.

"Well, I'm not so sure," replied Adye. "And you mustn't mind if it isn't, my friend. So long as it doesn't shrivel, there's much nowadays to be thankful for."

"I shan't be long," said Ware, who left to dress, and closed the doors after him with an indescribable relief. As he mounted the stairs his feeling of gratitude to Adye was unspeakable, and he realized that never in his life could he have tackled a difficulty in such a masterly way.

Adye sat down on the sofa opposite Magdalen. It was the first moment they had been alone since the day of the tragedy, and both of them remembered vividly what had passed between them on that afternoon. That interview was indelibly stamped upon their minds. It was there for ever.

It is not surprising, therefore, that at this first renewed meeting there should be with them both a feeling of embarrassment, however skilfully it might be concealed.

"And the Engadine has done you all the good in the world," were Adye's first words. "You were wise to go."

"Yes, the air and the quiet. It was restful," she replied rather wearily.

"Of course it was. Many a time I've gone there, fagged out after a hard term and a strenuous time in the House, and three weeks of that air have done marvels for me. It's like champagne."

Magdalen was unable to make small talk. She looked across at Adye suddenly.

"Michael," she said quietly, "this is the last time you will dine with my husband and me."

"Why, what have I done?" he asked with a laugh.

"We're—we're going to separate."

He looked at her fixedly, and a long pause followed before he asked:

"Finally?"

"Finally."

He rose from the sofa and walked about the room thoughtfully for some time. He then stopped.

"I understand," he said quietly.

"Two months ago," Magdalen proceeded, "before everything was suddenly changed for me, I—I was ready, as I told you, to stay on to help him, but now it's all so different."

"You mean you can afford to—?"

"Arrange for him to have everything in accordance with his position. I intend to behave liberally to him."

"That you're sure to do. It—it wouldn't be you to act otherwise. But as an old legal hand as well as an old friend I would suggest, if I may, the advisability of making no settlement of capital which—"

"You need have no fear of that. It will be a question of income solely."

"I see."

Another pause came. An uncomfortable sensation of embarrassment laid hold of Adye. Here he was, he thought,

in a man's house accepting his hospitality while tendering advice of this nature. A feeling of shame attacked him. He ought to be on neutral ground.

"Please forgive my talking as I did," he said. "As a guest here I couldn't be guilty of grosser taste, and I feel a — You have no party to-night, of course?"

"Only yourself and the Gurneys."

"Yes — well — as I shouldn't be upsetting your table, wouldn't it be better if I — if some telephone message had just come through, calling me away on business, or —?"

"No, no, Mike, I —"

Her words came out spontaneously without thought, and he went to her side.

"I think," he said, "it would be better for me to —"

"No — don't do that. I — I'm nervous to-night — apprehensive, somehow, and I should like you to stay — just to steady me. Silly of me, isn't it? But I feel —"

She shivered violently. Then, after controlling herself, she looked up at him and said:

"Mike, I've known you the requisite number of years, I think. Put some coal on, like an angel, will you?"

Adye went to the grate. He was thankful to her for the request. It gave him something to do. He placed two or three lumps on the fire very deliberately. While his back was turned to her, and nobody else could see, Magdalen regarded him with a great love and tenderness. She wondered how those two months of existence away from him had been passed. The flames of the big fire caught the fresh coal quickly. It crackled gaily. Adye remained in the same position for some time, watching the dancing light. Once or twice he took up the tongs and humoured it by changing the position of the new lumps. The process amused him, and it took time. No doubt the others would join them shortly, and they would go into dinner. There would be relief in that. A general conversation could be regulated easily, and his feelings could be disguised. The information which Magdalen had imparted to him impressed him keenly. The inevitableness of it had been plain to him for a long time. But now, when the news was given to him, there

was a suddenness in it. He had not expected to hear it at that moment. And if he had been asked to summarize his thoughts he could not have done so. He had only one settled conviction in his mind—that Magdalen was right in her decision. Yet from his point of view there was a general hopelessness in it all. What was the future going to bring her? Here was a young woman of five-and-twenty, endowed with great beauty and nobility of character, who had been badly used. She must continue to suffer from it. A legal separation was no real means of escape. It freed her of a presence, nothing more. She deserved *life*, and she could not obtain it. Through no fault of her own that was to be denied her. As a case, it was a case in a hundred to him. But this was no case to him. He loved her.

An uncomfortable silence between the two had lasted for some time, and Adye had taken up the poker. He now tapped the fire aimlessly, and the red-hot coals took the shape of faces which laughed at him, and as the flames leapt up the chimney they seemed to bear away remorselessly all his hopes and dreams. Nothing remained behind.

"Ah, that's lovely," said Magdalen at length, "I felt horribly cold before."

"It's this beastly east wind," he said with a laugh, without looking round, while he dug at the fire more strenuously, "that's what it is. It changes one's point of view of every mortal thing, and entirely smothers one's sense of humour. Why, even old Wrench this morning—he couldn't raise a smile."

"Mr. Justice Wrench?"

"Yes, I had a case before him. He was a complete metamorphosis. He was really. He became quite a respectable, dignified figure, and never once tried to crack a single rotten judicial joke."

"You don't say so," laughed out Magdalen.

Adye turned towards her, waving the poker in the air.

"And when I tell you," he said, "that it was a theatrical case with the court crammed with reporters, you'll realize how far answerable an east wind can be."

"And what a blessing in disguise."

"Yes; well, there's something in that. The judge has become fairly terrible with his jokes lately. Still, it does show what an east wind can do, doesn't it?"

Adye felt that he had come to the end of his tattle, and laid down the poker in the fender. A further pause followed, and embarrassment would but feebly describe the feelings of the two. He looked at her for a moment, the underhung jaw asserted itself, and he crossed a little awkwardly to the other side of the room.

"But here we are, gabbling on about all sorts of subjects," said Magdalen suddenly, "and I'm forgetting altogether to thank you for a great kindness you've done to-day."

"A kindness? I? What?" said Adye, as he sat in a chair some distance off.

"To young Marston Gurney."

"Oh, that — that's nothing," was the modest reply.

"It's a great deal, and I'm so grateful to you on little Celia's account."

"Marston ought to do all right at the Bar. My brother, Dick, is delighted to have him as a pupil."

"But," said Magdalen, thoughtfully, "a pupil has a fee to pay — a hundred guineas, isn't it?"

"As a rule, yes. But this is a matter of love with Dick. He's doing it to oblige me."

Magdalen hesitated for a moment and bit her lips.

"How good of you!" she murmured as she looked away.

"No, nonsense," replied Adye, with a laugh, "Dick's the chap who's doing the kindness, if it is a kindness."

"Yes, but because you asked him to. And you only asked him because you know how anxious I am for everything to go well with that child."

"Well — er — I hadn't exactly forgotten that, Magdalen, but I really believe Dick has got hold of a thundering good, useful fellow. Splendid what he did with his win on 'Aeroplane.' He's made of the right stuff, Marston."

They had talked rapidly on this subject, which was a relief to both of them. But a halt had to come, and it came now. The topic was exhausted. Another had to be found by one of them.

"Er — do you intend to live on in this house," continued Adye after some seconds, "after you and your husband have —?"

"Oh, yes."

"And to keep Wilbury?"

"No, no," was the downright answer. "Don't let us talk of Wilbury, Mike. It's a nightmare to me."

"Ah, I'm sorry," said the K.C., as he rose from his chair. "It was idiotic of me."

"Not that I can ever escape from it. I—I suppose you've seen the evening papers."

"Yes." And he sat by her side. "I'm so sorry for you —"

"It's persecution, Michael."

"Still, you know, the police have to do their duty."

"But surely they must see the futility of a search after a purely imaginary person."

"Perhaps, though, they don't think the person purely imaginary. In fact, I know they don't."

"How?"

"From Egerton. I saw him a few days ago, and he says the Director of Public Prosecutions is rather strong about it."

"Oh, but it's preposterous. Sir Henry was to have dined with us to-night."

"So he told me. Isn't he coming?"

"No, unfortunately. He's just telephoned that he's prevented. I was going to beg him to use his influence to have no further steps taken in the matter. If they only knew the pain all this is to me! What view does Sir Henry take himself?"

"Well, for all your sakes he would have gladly seen the matter dropped, but he's rather inclined to agree with the Director that the coroner's jury were right."

"Oh-h! But how can he?" asked Magdalen hotly, as she rose from the sofa. "Don't you think it monstrous?"

Adye did not answer, but knit his brows seriously. To differ from this woman upon any subject did not appeal to him. But in this matter it was hateful to him. He would not cause her pain for all the world.

"Michael! Do you agree with him?"

"Oh, do you really want me to say?"

"Yes. And I can bear to talk of it now?"

"Well, Magdalen, I'm inclined to agree with him. I would give anything — anything I possess to share your views in this," he cried, "anything to spare you pain, but I can't."

"But on that evidence alone?"

"I have nothing else to go upon." And he continued reluctantly: "There are certain things about it all that are inexplicable and not consistent with accidental death. But don't let us talk about it —"

"Yes, yes. I want to, to *you*," she said emphatically. "What is there about it?"

"Well, the unfastened punt which young Gurney had fixed firmly only a short time before, and which, if you remember, the poor boy himself, in answer to your advice before he went out, said he never touched."

"Well?"

"And then the marks on his throat."

"Oh, those doctors!"

"But the marks were certainly consistent with a struggle of some kind. They hardly could have been self-inflicted. And the evidence of the gardener about the punt and the man he saw in it —"

"Paterson! A ridiculous story!"

"If it stood alone — possibly. But, Magdalen, it doesn't stand alone. One has to take it with the rest. And I'm awfully afraid, painful as I know it is to you, that you must be prepared for the police not letting the matter rest till they've searched every channel that might help them."

"That's perfectly plain. That meddling creature, Inspector Watkin, is particularly busy. My husband, before he went away, was mad enough to give him permission to do what he liked. He appears to have taken possession of the place so far as I can understand. Only to-night we've heard they've been dragging the lake again —"

"Ah, you see, Magdalen, Watkin is a police inspector who evidently wants to get on."

"While we have to pay the price of his efforts. Very

charming that! But, Michael, what earthly object could there possibly be in dragging the lake again? I thought the one reason for it had been accomplished when they found poor Eustace. Where is the sense of it?"

"Well, one thing, speaking offhand, that it might mean is that they want to see if they can find anything which could have caused that small contusion on the forehead."

"Oh, but how perfectly mad!"

"Mind, I don't say it is that. It was only an idea that just came into my head. I'm afraid I do get mad ideas sometimes. But, you know Watkin's attitude is typical. There he is in a quiet uneventful spot, with the chances of anything likely to advance him decidedly remote. This terrible affair crops up, and rightly or wrongly he forms his own conclusions. And assuming the guilt of someone or other, all his energies are centred in that one direction. He wants by hook or by crook to unearth something. It's the chance of his life. Oh, I have seen it over and over again. In this case he'll probably fail ignominiously, but still he sticks to it. And if something could arise to prove incontrovertibly that this was a case of accidental death pure and simple, Watkin never would be convinced — never, my dear friend. His fat head would shake wisely till he was put in his coffin."

"Of course it would," said a voice from behind them. It was Ware who spoke. He was now dressed immaculately for dinner, and, unseen by Adye and Magdalen, had entered the room by the folding doors in time to hear Adye's views upon Inspector Watkin.

"Why, even I in my amateur way," continued Ware, "have seen a goodish number of these detective chaps in the witness-box. They're all alike. First of all they want to catch somebody, and, having caught somebody, they want at any price to run the somebody in. Why, if a case is going in favour of the prisoner I've often watched the detective in charge of the thing. He's on the rack all the time. But I'm to blame here, I know. I ought not to have given the fool *carte blanche* as I did."

"Yes," answered Magdalen, "but it must be stopped

somehow. Surely, Michael, if some one in a high position gave his orders to Inspector Watkin he would have to be obeyed."

"Certainly."

"Then Sir Henry must do it. He's Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department. Surely he could do it."

"He would carry great weight, of course," said Adye, "but probably the Director of Public Prosecutions would have a word to say. Sir George is not an easy man to move."

"Do you know him, Mike?" asked Magdalen.

"Oh, yes."

"Then could you possibly put it to him?"

"I might."

"I should be so grateful if you would. Tell him the misery that all this is causing us—the horrible publicity—everything, and that we ourselves are convinced of the wickedness of that verdict. Will you?"

"Of course I will. I would do anything to spare you all this suffering. But, as I said just now, the Director holds a strongish view about poor Eustace."

"What? Does he think it was murder?" asked Ware.

"Yes."

"Ah, that makes it difficult," Ware rejoined. "But what I can't get over is the question of motive. What conceivable object, according to the evidence, could there possibly be in killing Eustace; where's the motive for it?"

"That's often the crux," answered Adye.

"Still, here robbery is out of the question— isn't it?"

"Perhaps they don't think so."

"Well, then they ought to think so."

"But of course," agreed Magdalen.

"They found plenty of money in the poor boy's pockets—gold and silver. And then his watch and chain," continued Ware.

"Yes, but does any one know how much money Eustace had on him before he went down to the lake?" asked Adye.

"Well, no—"

"That's straining it dreadfully," argued Magdalen.

"I dare say it is. But they have to hunt everywhere, worse luck," Adye proceeded. "Assuming there was a blackguard there, he might, for all we know, have taken two or three pounds, and left the rest as a 'blind.' I don't say it was so, but it just possibly might have been."

"I confess that never occurred to me," said Ware.

"But of course not," protested Magdalen. "And I don't think it really occurred to you, Mike."

"Well, then," Ware went on, "if we eliminate that motive, what is there? Eustace hadn't an enemy in the world. And there wasn't a living being except Magdalen and myself to whom his death meant anything."

"*That's it*," interrupted Magdalen vehemently. "And you know what the world is. It's not exactly a charitable institution."

Adye turned sharply towards her in horror.

"Oh, but you can't think that people —!"

"Haven't I heard them in other cases? Is ours so very different? That's what I'm going through, and I can't help it."

A dead silence fell upon the three. It was broken at last by Ware.

"There's only one way to treat that sort of thing," he said — "with contempt."

At that moment Gurney and Celia joined them from the hall, and Rate at the dining-room door announced funereally that dinner was served.

Celia almost ran to Adye, and took his hand warmly.

"Thank you so much, Mr. Adye, for your kindness to Marston," she said.

"Oh, don't talk of that," replied the K.C.

"But I'll tell you what your brother will find him."

"What?"

"A genius!"

"Oh, shut it, Celia," said Gurney.

"Why, what's going to happen to you, Marston?" Ware inquired.

"He's going to my brother's chambers," was Adye's reply.

"Splendid!"

And Ware looked at Adye. "Will you go in first with my wife?" he said. "And, Marston, will you take yours."

Gurney regarded his host with some surprise, and Adye, whose arm Magdalen had just taken, turned round with an effort of gaiety.

"What! husband and wife together!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, why not?" said Ware with a forced laugh. "Let them be unconventional."

The two couples passed through the doorway to the dining-room. Ware stood still for a moment, and forgot that Rate was still waiting for him by the door. He passed his hand across his forehead without disarranging his carefully brushed hair, and uttered a suspicion of a sigh. There was a look of solitude about the man. Did he feel solitary? Was he meditating that this was to be the last dinner he would share with his wife? Or what was he thinking?

"Her ladyship's at the table, Sir Hubert," ventured Rate very quietly.

"Oh, right."

And with a hitch at the lapels of his faultlessly cut dress coat, and a slight tug at the ends of his necktie, he joined the others quickly at the table, while Rate closed the door after him, and proceeded to hand the soup-plates, or to superintend the handing of them by the footmen — which of the two does not matter seriously.

CHAPTER XX

MAGDALEN and her husband sat at either end of the beautiful, old mahogany table, Ware's back being turned to the door which led into the morning-room whence the party had just come. Gurney sat upon his right alone, and upon the other side were Adye and Celia, the former being upon Magdalen's immediate right, and the latter between Adye and Ware.

If it had been a family gathering in the strict sense of the word, conversation in the circumstances would have been decidedly meagre—in fact, impossible. As it was, the position of the five was peculiar. No one as yet, with the exception of Michael Adye, was acquainted with the final determination of Magdalen in regard to her future life, and Ware was ignorant of Adye's knowledge of it. Accordingly both the Gurneys, who upon their own account were in good spirits that evening over Marston's prospects, and Ware were able to touch upon various topics quite naturally. Adye, too, on his part, was a man of the world, and with a successful concealment of his own thoughts and his gifts as a listener, affected a lively interest in all that was said, while no one could have passed the remotest adverse criticism upon Magdalen's capacity of hostess.

Conversation darted from one subject to another inconsequently, as it is wont to do; and when it touched upon the Engadine, Adye maintained that the railway had spoilt it.

"Still, you get there all the quicker," was Gurney's opinion.

"And a very comfortable journey," agreed Magdalen.

"Oh, yes, I know all that," the K.C. agreed. "But I liked the old drive in the *diligence* or the *extra-post*. There's a bit of the *laudator temporis acti* about me, I'm afraid."

"What's that?" inquired Celia laughingly.

"Ask Marston. He's a classical scholar. But there's one thing they can't alter—the mountains," continued Adye.

"But what about the *Jungfrau*?" interrupted Ware. "They've run a railway up that, haven't they?"

"Yes, that's true, the vandals," Adye replied. "Nothing's sacred now — property or mountains. It's all the same. A loathsome age."

Champagne was at that moment poured into the K.C.'s glass.

"'99 Clicquot," said Ware. "Let's make the most of it. It's the last bottle we shall crack here."

Adye looked a little uncomfortable at the remark, and thought it somewhat strange of Ware to make it. Magdalen felt the same; and the result was a slight pause. But there was in Ware's mind no meaning attaching to his words. He did not, in fact, consider their appositeness when he uttered them.

"No," he continued innocently, "it's the last of the lot. And I shan't try to get any more."

Adye then saw that Ware's observation was quite innocuous, and referred to nothing more momentous than the wine.

"Difficult to beat," he said, "but prohibitive now, of course."

He then turned to Celia and raised his glass to her:

"Pump Court!" he exclaimed.

"Pump Court? What's that?" asked Celia laughingly.

"My brother's chambers."

"Where Marston is going?"

"Certainly."

"What an awful address!"

The two barristers laughed at Celia, and Gurney leaned across the table in the direction of the K.C.

"Mr. Adye—" he began.

"Whom are you addressing?" was Adye's sharp question. If there had been no twinkle in his eye it would have been alarming.

"Why — er —"

"No more 'Mister' if you please, Marston. There's your first lesson." And he turned to Magdalen. "That's our etiquette at the Bar, no matter how great the disparity of age."

"Is that so? I never knew that," she said.

"Oh, yes, an invariable rule."

"But suppose you're Attorney-General in the next Government and are knighted?" asked Ware.

"Well, then he can Sir Michael me as much as he likes. But what were you going to say, Marston?"

"Oh, nothing important," replied Gurney. "I was only wondering how you get all your work done. When do you begin?"

"Four in the morning?"

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Celia. "Will Marston have to do that?"

"Not just yet," was Gurney's amused answer.

"No, but some day, I hope he will," continued Adye.

"I don't!" protested Celia.

"Yes, I turn out every morning at four, and light my own fire and make my own tea."

"Of course, if you do it yourself it's all right," said Celia.

"But I know perfectly well I should have to light Marston's fire for him."

Thus the talk at the table ambled on pleasantly enough. It had its gaps, no doubt, but they were not allowed by any of the company to be of long duration. They discussed the perennial autumn session; the chances of a General Election; the certainty of the triumphant return of Adye's party to power; the formation of the new government, in which it was universally acknowledged that he could hold almost any post he chose to ask for, though it was an open secret amongst his friends that, since the death a month ago of his colleague, Sir Henry Fowlett, he would infinitely prefer the Attorney-Generalship to any other, even without Cabinet rank; the latest strike, which Magdalen calculated was the fifty-second in twelve months, or, in other words, one a week; the General Labour Unrest; and the newest phase of Syndicalism, over which Gurney, with the privilege of youth on his side and with the aid of the Clicquot, became dogmatic, and maintained, with all the weight of his twenty-five years and his impending return to the Bar, that what the country needed was the death of the party system and the birth of a

man. This last plea set things rolling merrily, since "M.A." was one of the most formidable party fighters in the country, and in his friendly argument with Gurney put the point succinctly by asking: "Yes, but where should we all come in?"

"Why, of course," agreed Ware. "We all want to live to see Adye on the Woolsack, and we shall, under the party system."

Magdalen at that observation forgot all her heart-burnings. Her face beamed in agreement with her husband's words, as her eyes turned and fell upon the man she loved. How she prayed for his success! No one but Celia noticed her look of pride, which brought back to the girl rudely the confession which only just now her friend had made to her. And while the others kept the conversation flowing, Celia remained silent with her thoughts and fears. Her old forebodings returned to her with redoubled force. The sense of impending disaster seized hold of her again. Certainly she remembered Magdalen's protestations in the other room, but the dread haunted her that when the supreme test came, as come it would, her strength might fail her. It would, after all, be so natural for it to do so. And with all the talking in the world, when two people are in love they are as blind as justice ought to be. Yet, thanks to this harmless discussion upon the party system, a new point of view presented itself to Celia. The most wonderful preferment was practically at Michael Adye's feet; and by one false step from Magdalen it would inevitably be swept away. That, then, must be the lever to use when the chance came. It would appeal assuredly to Magdalen. She was innately unselfish. She loved deeply. The contemplation of the ruin of the man she loved would be impossible to her. She never could blast his life. Thus Celia argued within herself, laying it all out before her like a chess-problem, and seeing checkmate at the end. It is all very easy on paper.

Some little time after the small party had begun dinner, and the conversation had drifted on as we have seen, the head-housemaid entered the now empty morning-room by the folding-doors from the hall, and proceeded, as was her

duty, to put everything in order. Being a well-trained servant she did it thoroughly. She bunched up the crushed cushions upon the chairs and sofas, tidied the grate, carefully folded the evening paper, which Madgalen had thrown aside on reading the "reward" paragraph, and extinguished the various electric lamps. Seeing that everything was in order, she then passed through the folding-doors, which she closed after her, and turned off the switch which regulated the cut-glass chandelier. This plunged the morning-room into darkness except for the fire-glow.

Shortly afterwards, as the maid was about to descend to the basement, a bell rang. One of the footmen came out of the dining-room to the hall at that instant, and the maid, before her disappearance downstairs, informed him that there was some one at the front door.

A few moments later the folding doors of the morning-room were opened quietly by the same footman, who at once lighted the electric lamp upon the piano. He then turned round somewhat nervously and faced the doors, through which Sir Henry Egerton entered slowly, wearing his day clothes and carrying his tall hat.

"Will you wait here, Sir Henry, and I'll tell her ladyship," said the footman.

"No, stay," replied Egerton peremptorily and in a half whisper.

"Very well, Sir Henry."

Egerton placed his hat upon a small table, and came to the centre of the room in serious thought.

"I don't wish her ladyship to be told I'm here," he said gravely.

"Very well, Sir Henry." And the footman caught Egerton's hushed tone.

"Her ladyship and Sir Hubert are at dinner, you say?" And Egerton accompanied his question by an indication of the door which led to the dining-room.

"Yes, Sir Henry."

"It's not a party, I think?"

"Only Mr. Adye and Mr. and Mrs. Gurney, Sir Henry." Egerton hesitated for some moments.

"Is there anywhere I can write a note?" he then asked.

"You'll find paper there, Sir Henry." And the footman walked to Magdalen's writing-table, where he turned up another light.

Egerton followed him very slowly and sat down. He took a pen in his hand, and sat staring at the paper in front of him. As the light from the lamp fell upon his face the footman noticed its pallor.

"I'll give you a little more light, Sir Henry," he said fearfully as he passed through the doors and lighted the chandelier from the switch outside, only to return to Egerton immediately afterwards, and to find him in the same position.

There was a moment's silence while the footman waited, and Egerton looked round.

"Would you just close those doors," he almost whispered.

The footman did so, and remained near them with his eyes riveted upon the set face of the Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department.

Egerton then appeared suddenly to carry out a resolution, and wrote a note hurriedly which he placed in an envelope. With that he rose from the chair slowly and walked very deliberately to the middle of the room, sticking down the envelope as he went.

"I want you," he said in the same hushed tone, "to give this note quietly to Sir Hubert."

"Yes, Sir Henry." And the footman took the envelope from him.

"Without disturbing any one else, and without mentioning that I am here—even in answer to any question. You understand?"

The note of command in his voice left no room for any misunderstanding, and the footman answered nervously:

"Perfectly, Sir Henry."

The next moment the footman passed into the dining-room with the note, and shut the door after him.

Sir Henry Egerton remained motionless for a few seconds. An air of deep concern and anxiety hung over him. He then walked to the folding-doors, which he opened cautiously,

and looked towards the front entrance to the house. Apparently satisfied by what he saw, he reclosed the doors, and, stroking his chin in serious thought, came again to the middle of the room. He had only to wait a moment before Ware entered quickly from the dining-room.

"Ssh!" whispered Egerton with his finger to his lips, while with his other hand he signalled silently to Ware to shut the door behind him.

Ware did so at once and came to the other's side.

"What's up, Egerton?" he asked quietly as he extended his hand, which Egerton retained. "I thought you couldn't come. Anything — wrong?"

"I'm afraid there is," replied the other with a frown as he released Ware's hand. "Your wife doesn't know I'm here?"

"No. You asked me in your note not to mention your name. She merely thinks someone's come on important business."

"I'm glad."

"But what the devil's the matter? You look like a thunder-cloud."

There was a second's pause before Egerton answered gravely:

"I have a task before me the like of which I've never had to perform."

"I'm awfully sorry, Egerton. Can I help you in any way?"

"You can, Ware," was the steady reply.

"Then fire away."

Egerton placed both hands upon Ware's shoulders, and looked into his eyes.

"You can help me by trying all you know how to keep your nerve," he said, "and by believing that never in my life have I suffered as I'm suffering now."

"Well, I'll do anything I can. Tell me."

Egerton did not remove his hands from Ware's shoulders as he began his answer with a great effort.

"This evening," he said slowly, "a warrant has been issued for — your arrest."

"My — my arrest!" re-echoed Ware in amazement. "For what, in heaven's name?"

Egerton's voice sank to a whisper, and he could barely speak the words, as he supported Ware by the arms:

"The murder of Eustace Ede."

"What!"

"Ssh!"

Ware shook from head to foot, and made an effort to speak. After a few moments he controlled himself and faced Egerton with a hollow laugh. "Oh, you're — joking!" And he fought for words again. "Or you're mad! You — you don't know what you're saying. Good God!"

Again he shivered violently, and Egerton, clasping him as before with both hands, said:

"Steady, man, steady! Control yourself."

"Control myself!" cried Ware. "Control myself, you say! And — and — and the grounds for — for this, Egerton?"

"There, I'm afraid I have to sink the human being and become an official — a machine. I have those with me whom you must question if you think fit," and he pointed towards the folding-doors; "though, as a friend, I may perhaps go the length of advising you to say as little as possible when you go with them. You will have ample opportunity of —"

"Of proving the scandal of such a charge, of exposing a damned conspiracy! And I'll seize it. By heaven, I'll seize it, Egerton!"

Ware's hand was raised wildly in the air. His voice had carried to the other room, and Magdalen stood in the doorway.

She looked at Sir Henry Egerton inquiringly, and at the same time an expression of fear crossed her face.

"Sir Henry!" she exclaimed in a whisper.

"Lady Ware, I —"

A terrible silence followed, and Ware, with a brave effort to master his feelings, took a step forward.

"Magdalen," he said, "I'll tell you myself."

Egerton took Magdalen's hand.

"If it wasn't for the horror of it," Ware proceeded, "the whole thing would be too childish."

"What—what? Tell me," she entreated.

"And that's the way you and I must look at it."

"Tell me! Tell me!"

"I—I'm accused of the—murder—of your brother, Eustace."

Magdalen put her hand quickly over her mouth and stifled a cry of agony. And then during the pause which followed her eyes looked with withering scorn at Egerton, and she drew herself up with dignity to her full height as she said to him slowly:

"How—dare—you?"

"It isn't I," protested Egerton feelingly. "And I must beg you to believe, Lady Ware, that I feel most deeply for you."

"Feel for me! Feel for me!"

"Most terribly. The duties of my work have never placed me in such an awful position. And it's because of my—friendship for you that I am here."

"*Because* of it! You're laughing at me! I dare say it's very easy to do that."

"I only came at all to—to try to prepare you"—and he turned to Ware, who was staring dazedly in front of him—"to try to make it less grievous to bear."

"But it's cruel, wicked, devilish," interrupted Magdalen. "Why, you could have prevented this!"

"I, Lady Ware?"

"Yes, by telling the truth of what occurred on that afternoon. You were there! You were there—in the house at the very time!"

"Well, I was in the garden," replied Egerton.

"Oh, that's a fine quibble the law can make use of, I suppose," protested the indignant woman. "But this is not the moment for quibbles, Sir Henry, and I resent them. My husband at the time my brother met his death was in the library with me and Mr. Adye. He then joined you upon the croquet lawn. You—you know that perfectly well. Hubert, speak, for God's sake!"

"That is so," said Ware. "But perhaps Sir Henry Egerton will dispute the fact."

"Forgive me," answered Egerton, "but this is not the place for me to —"

"It's cowardly!" cried Magdalen.

Ware had now controlled himself wonderfully, and he turned quietly to his wife.

"I'm afraid, Magdalen," he said, "that we're wasting Sir Henry's time. His underlings in the hall will be growing impatient."

He then walked to her side, and watched her standing still with a wild stare in her eyes.

"It's no use giving at the knees, you know," he said to her cheerfully. "We must stiffen our backs for this, you and I. Buck up!"

He hesitated for a moment as if to kiss her. Then he pulled himself back and merely held out his hand. She took it slowly and vainly tried to frame some words. Egerton had turned his back upon them, and opened the doors. He went out beyond them into the hall. Ware then joined him with a quick, firm step, and passed into the hands of two officers of the law, who drove away with him in a taxi-cab.

The bang of the front door travelled swiftly to Magdalen's ears. She realized its meaning, and as Egerton returned to the room he found her with her face buried in her hands.

"Lady Ware," he said gently, "is there anything I can do?"

"Leave me," she cried hysterically.

"Still, if I could —"

"Leave me!"

The Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department then took up his hat in silence and left the house.

CHAPTER XXI

FROM the dining-room Magdalen had distinctly heard her husband's raised voice during his terrible interview with Egerton. She had no notion who the visitor was at that strange hour, and she relied upon Ware's speedy return to the table. As that was not forthcoming she became apprehensive and silent — why, she could not have told — and she strained her ears to listen. For a time the subdued voices of the two men travelled through the closed door from the morning-room, and the time passed. Then there came the loud, sharp cry from Ware which caused her to spring to her feet and to ascertain the cause. The appalling sequel to her departure was unknown to Adye and the Gurneys, who remained in their places waiting. The delay seemed to them interminable. Each one of the three became anxious. Something unusual had undoubtedly occurred. They could only wonder what. No one spoke, and from behind the door they could hear the three voices. The words were inaudible, but Magdalen's tone was to them clearly one of anguish.

Something untoward had happened. And Adye's love for the woman swept him away. Whatever it was, he might be able to help her. It was a cry of distress, and he could endure it no longer. Probably it was no affair of his, but he could not help that. They could call him a meddler, or anything else. That was unimportant to him if he could come to her aid. There was no other living being, he felt, who understood her as he did. At any rate, he could but ask if he could help. In any case, while there was but a flimsy bit of wood dividing him from the woman he loved and who was suffering, he was not the man to be thwarted by it. He would have broken it in had it been necessary. And he rose determinedly to his feet, with Celia's eyes fixed upon him.

"There's something wrong," whispered Gurney.

"Yes," replied Adye shortly, as he approached the door.

"Don't you think it would be better to wait?" suggested Celia. "Magdalen will be back directly."

"But from the cry I heard something serious has happened." And he took hold of the door-handle.

"Everything is quiet now," continued Celia nervously.

This was at the moment when Egerton left the house, and Magdalen was alone. Not a sound was to be heard, and Adye paused with his fingers still upon the handle. He was about to turn it when the door was opened violently from the other side, and Magdalen stood before him, a transformed being from what she was only a few minutes before.

Her face was drawn with an intense pain and horror, and her eyes were shut tightly. Every limb in her body shook, and her teeth chattered violently in her effort to speak. She would have fallen forward if Adye had not caught her and held her firmly in his arms. She was almost unconscious. The next instant he lifted her from her feet like a child and placed her gently upon a sofa in the morning-room. Celia and Marston Gurney rushed to the sideboard for the brandy and water, and the glass was held to her mouth. She was able to drink a little, and it seemed to revive her. She clasped Adye's hand madly, and at length was able to speak.

"Michael! Michael!" she cried. "They — they've arrested — Hubert. They say — he — killed — my brother!"

The blow to the other three was overwhelming. Adye stepped back from her side horror-stricken, and there was no colour in the face of any of them. The silence then in that room could certainly be felt.

"But on what grounds?" at length asked Gurney indignantly.

"I don't know that," replied Magdalen more strongly. "They haven't chosen to tell me that. They haven't chosen to tell me anything. All I know is what I've said, and that's enough, I fancy."

Her voice had fallen to a whisper, but it quickly regained its strength as she allowed her indignation to burst forth,

"It's inhuman, this," she cried, "and it shan't go unpunished so long as there is breath in my body. Tell me, Michael, what can Hubert do? What can *I* do? Tell me!"

"Nothing can be done yet," he answered tenderly.

"Oh, but something must be done! We *must* find something that *can* be done!"

"It sounds a heartless thing to say, Magdalen, but we can only wait events."

"Wait! Wait! Wait! How long are we to wait? What are we to wait for?"

The tortured woman was inconsolable. It was useless to try to comfort her. What comfort in the world could there be for any one in a like position? The crash was overpowering. And though, to the relief of the others, her physical strength had returned to her, her mental agony was unutterable. She stood up suddenly, and with a big, sweeping movement of her arms thrust every one away from her. Then she paced the room up and down for minutes by the clock like a caged animal. At one moment she seemed to forget the other three in the room, at the next she looked as if she wished they were gone.

Adye then took Celia by the arm, and said very quietly to her and Gurney: "Leave me alone with her for a while. Wait in the library. I'll call you at once if there's any need."

"Very well," replied Celia, who then passed out into the hall with her husband. Magdalen saw the folding-doors close, and uttered a cry of relief. She would have been unable to say why, but now she was alone with the one person she had grown to lean upon. He was the personification of strength and goodness to her. He might say something to ease her mind. He might make a suggestion. If any one on the earth could comfort her it was he. There was no other living soul who could.

He stood quite still waiting for her to choose the time to speak. She had only to command him. He was her slave. But she continued to pace the room frantically, and coming to his side by the sofa near the fire she stopped suddenly.

"What can I do?" she cried. "Tell me what I can do, Michael, for God's sake!"

Seeing that she was becoming beyond control he seized hold of both her hands almost roughly.

"You must keep calm, or you can do nothing. Sit down!"

The note of stern command in his voice had an instantaneous effect upon her. With her hands still gripped by his she did what she was ordered, and Adye sat down by her. Already she was comforted to some extent. She was conscious of the power of the man, and, being essentially a feminine woman, it appealed to her.

"I—I'm sorry, Michael, if I'm difficult," she said, "I—I'll try to be good."

"You can't make anything better by being otherwise," he answered tenderly. "And we need all our wits about us, you know."

"But it's a fiendish thing, this! Think what Hubert must be suffering! To be accused of such a frightful thing is—"

"I know, but everything must be done to make it bearable. It will all come right, you'll see."

"Ah, do you think it will?" And she clung to his hand helplessly.

"Of course."

"Oh, I wish now I hadn't said to him what I did just before you came."

"What was that?"

"When I told him we must separate for ever."

"You must banish all that from your mind, Magdalen. It's outside the case entirely."

"Still, I can't help wishing it. He would have been less lonely to-night if I had only waited. But I didn't know what was going to happen."

"How could you have known? Besides, you may depend upon one thing—that at this moment nothing but this ghastly charge is in his mind. Think of nothing else, I beg of you, Magdalen. As to the other matter, if I may speak freely, no man alive knows better than your husband how finely you have treated him—except one."

"Who?"

"Myself."

There was silence for some moments. Then Magdalen was the first to speak.

"Why have they done this terrible thing, Michael?"

"They must suppose they have some evidence, Magdalen," was the grave answer.

"But, in the name of heaven, what evidence *could* there be?"

"I wish I could think. I can't. They must imagine, I presume, that they've found some to support the motive."

"The motive! The motive! We always have that to haunt us. But there has to be more than a motive, Michael. You know, as I know, that this charge is an impossible one. And there's the cruelty of it."

"How do you mean, Magdalen?"

"Why, upon that awful day Hubert was with you and me in the library until he joined the others on the croquet lawn."

"That's perfectly true," exclaimed Adye.

"And it was then — it must have been — that Eustace —"

"Quite right. Keep your mind on that point entirely. You're splendidly helpful now."

He was giving her all the encouragement she so greatly needed. He had no other thought but that of helping her to bear this terrible thing, and he realized that his only hope of success lay in the endeavour to make her cut away all the fringe of the story, and at all costs to prevent her mind from dwelling upon any remorse or regrets which at this moment she was prone to entertain, however unreasonably. But it was a herculean task. The human being is rare who in the hour of grief does not ponder upon what might have been or might not have been had a different course been pursued. And the philosophy of "What's done cannot be undone" is precious hard to follow. Adye's difficulty, however, did not end there. There was much in his mind that for Magdalen's sake he could not give utterance to. First and foremost there was his knowledge as an experienced counsel that no warrant in a case of this nature would have been applied for without evidence, and, indeed, without strong evidence. He knew perfectly well that the department of the Director of Public Prosecutions would not move in the matter without

reasonable cause, and that there must be something more behind the institution of criminal proceedings than mere idle suspicion. What that something was they could only wait and learn. At the same time, what Magdalen had just said was true. There was the fact that upon that fateful afternoon Ware had been with the others, and was present with them when the boy went to bathe. He stayed behind in the house. Then Magdalen, he remembered, suggested to her husband that he was somewhat neglecting Sir Henry Egerton, whom he then joined upon the croquet lawn, both the Gurneys being there, and subsequently, not long afterwards, the entire party returned to the house from the garden, and the news of the catastrophe was brought to Ware in their presence. At the first blush it appeared to him to be an overwhelming piece of evidence in Ware's favour, and it was difficult for him to see how any prosecution could get over it.

As this last thought passed through his mind a look of hopefulness crossed his face, and he walked quickly to the other side of the room.

"Something good has occurred to you, Michael?" asked Magdalen excitedly.

"I was only working out what you said. It's incontestable. Now let us think."

The underhung jaw became very prominent as he brought all his concentration of mind to bear, and his eyes glistened.

"Bragsons are your ordinary solicitors, aren't they?" he asked.

"Yes."

"No good in a matter of this kind. You must have Charles Bodsell."

"Any one you advise, Michael."

"I'll tell you what I'll do. We mustn't use the telephone for this. I know Arthur Bragson well. Directly I leave you I'll go to his house to see him. I'll tell him what has happened, and say that you wish him to communicate at once with Charles Bodsell. He'll gladly fall in with your wish. His is merely a family business. He'd never undertake a criminal case."

"A criminal case!" cried Magdalen.

"Now, now, try not to think of that," he said, returning quickly to her side. "You're awfully good, but you must continue to be so. See? First of all I'll ring up Arthur Bragson to see if he's in."

With that he went promptly to the telephone upon the writing-table. He got the number quickly.

"Is that Mr. Bragson speaking?—Right! I'm Mr. Adye. Shall you be in in half an hour's time if I drop in to see you?—Very important.—Good. In about half an hour, then. Good-bye."

He returned to Magdalen's side, and again sat down by her.

"So far all right, eh?"

"How good you are!" and she laid a hand upon his arm and burst into tears.

"Now, now," he said half scoldingly, while he took her by the shoulders as he would a child, "that won't do, you know. If you cry you'll knock all the thoughts out of my head, and I shall be done." And he tried very hard to laugh. She raised her face, and her eyes looked steadily into his. The grief and the beauty in them he could not trust himself to gaze upon too long. He turned his head away. To see a woman cry is one of the worst things that can happen to a man. What must this man's suffering have been to look upon such tears?

"Don't cry," he besought her gently.

"I—I'm sorry. Forgive me. I—I'm better now."

She dried her eyes bravely and with an effort to collect her thoughts she said suddenly:

"Michael, there—there's another point that's just struck me."

"What's that?"

"Why, on that very day Hubert had written to the German family in Hanover about Eustace going there the next Monday. That came out at the inquest."

"Yes, that's a good point!" exclaimed Adye excitedly. "Did the letter go?"

"I can't say. But Rate might know. Ring the bell, Michael, will you?"

Adye quickly pressed the bell, and Rate, as may be imagined in the circumstances, was not slow to answer it.

"Rate," began Magdalen haltingly.

"Yes, my lady." And there was a note of genuine feeling in his voice.

"Will — will you ask him, Michael?"

Adye was glad of the request. He felt he could put the question without "leading" the butler in any way, and that possibly he might obtain a clear answer one way or the other.

"Rate, I want you to take your mind back as clearly as you can to the day of Mr. Eustace's death. Do you think you can remember everything you did quite distinctly?"

"I shall never forget anything I did on that day, sir."

"Very well then; had you charge of any letters for the post?"

"Yes, sir, Mr. Gurney gave me several."

"Can you recollect if anything about them struck you at all?"

"Well, sir, Mr. Gurney gave me a packet."

"Whose handwriting was upon the envelopes?"

"Mr. Gurney's, sir. But they were letters of Sir Hubert's. Mr. Gurney said so, sir."

"And were they placed in the official letter-box?"

"Yes, sir. I posted them myself. And I remember a little later there was another, an odd one. That was in Sir Hubert's writing, sir."

"In Sir Hubert's writing? Are you sure?"

"Quite, sir. I noticed it particularly, because it was addressed to Germany."

"You're certain of that?" asked Adye eagerly.

"Positive, sir. I remember the name of the place, too, sir — Hanover."

"And you posted it?"

"I did, sir."

"Thank you, Rate."

The butler saw that his services were no longer required, and retired from the room with the conviction, from Adye's demeanour, that his information had been decidedly helpful.

When he had closed the folding-doors Adye brought down his hand upon his knee excitedly, and said:

"That letter is a vital piece of evidence for your husband, Magdalen. Without any delay we must communicate with the family at Hanover, and find out if they've kept it. If they have, the prosecution will have no small difficulty in meeting it."

"But if they haven't kept it!" exclaimed Magdalen.

"Even then your husband will remember having written it. Rate can speak to having posted it, and it's more than likely that Marston Gurney, as Sir Hubert's secretary, was aware of its contents."

A look of real pleasure and relief crossed Magdalen's face for the first time. It was not lost upon Adye, and he took her hand warmly.

"You see, my dear friend, everything's going well — everything. I told you it would. We've only got to keep up our peckers, you know. And we've only just started. Let them bring any case they like. It would have to be an overwhelming one to beat your husband's."

"But, Michael, how long will it last? What exactly has got to occur?"

Adye hesitated. He then regarded her fixedly. "Look here, Magdalen," he said steadily, "you've got to be the great, brave soul you've always been, as I know you will be. It can only be a big ordeal. It can't be anything else. But you'll come through it. I *know* you will."

"But whatever my suffering," she replied, "it can be as nothing compared with his. Think of that! Just think of it!"

"And you'll help him to bear it."

She could not utter a word for some time. She then turned to him and asked fearfully: "How long will it take, Michael? How long?"

"I can't say. But it must take time. You must make up your mind to that. First of all there must be the police court proceedings, which will begin to-morrow. Then, no doubt, as in every other case, there will be remand after re-

mand. The length of it all must depend upon the amount of evidence."

"Of course the magistrate could dismiss the case, couldn't he?" asked Magdalen hopefully.

Adye looked at her seriously.

"I'm going to be perfectly frank, Magdalen. It would be cruel to be anything else. But such a course in a grave case of this kind is unlikely. You must make up your mind for it to go to trial."

"Oh, but that means months of agony and suspense!" she cried.

"I'm afraid so."

"What is it now? — November. It might not be before January!"

"It could hardly be earlier."

"Oh, but, Michael, it's unending. It's torture!"

"This is poor comfort, I know, but if it was America it would take a year."

The agonized woman without a word threw up her hands in despair, and Adye was quick to seize hold of them.

"You mustn't give way. You shan't!" he exclaimed with all the force at his command.

"But think of *him*!"

"It is of you I'm thinking now — of you alone. Your husband will bear this like any other man in the same position. If the guilty can come through it the innocent can. You must remember that. And if I know anything of your husband he will stand it better than most. But with you it's different. Your health is everything —!"

"My health! As if it mattered to a soul!"

"It matters to me, Magdalen! It is everything to me! I'm not going to have you broken by this! You've had to endure much — far beyond your share, and you're going to endure this as no woman before you has endured it! For my sake —!"

His voice rang out fervently. He was failing to measure his words. He was being carried away by his overpowering love for the woman. He had looked on at her misery in the past, and it had maddened him. And now he was watching

her racked by her deepest woman's sympathy for the man who, he alone knew, had tried to cheat her, however certain his innocence of this awful charge might be. Is it to be wondered at that his feelings were indescribable, and that his mind was centred solely in her? Is it surprising that he scarcely gave a thought to Ware? He loved the woman, and he was human. Ware would come through his ordeal. Knowing his nature, Michael Adye had very little doubt about that. But the strain upon Magdalen would be unspeakable. And it was for this man who loved her, but who must stifle all expression of it, to help her to bear it by every means in his power.

His last sentence he had left unfinished, and a pause followed it.

"For the sake of our — friendship, I mean. That is my most priceless possession."

"I shall bear it," was her whispered answer.

"Ah, that's you!" he cried.

He held both her hands again, but with the action of a *friend*. There was a power in the grasp more eloquent than words. She felt her weakness, and she realized his strength. He was there to lean upon at a crisis as great as could come to any woman. A man is useful sometimes.

"But I shall want help in this," she continued pathetically. "It's a great deal to bear."

"All the help I can give you, Magdalen, is yours, you know. You have only to command it."

"Michael!" she cried out suddenly, with a note of inspiration in her voice.

"Yes?"

She rested both her hands trustingly upon his shoulders, and looked plaintively into his eyes as she asked in a faltering voice:

"Will you — will you defend my husband?"

He did not stir at the entreaty. His eyes remained fixed upon hers. Her very soul was speaking to him.

"Yes," he whispered, "I will."

One poignant cry of gratitude came from the woman, and the next instant Adye was gone from the room.

CHAPTER XXII

HE hastened to the Gurneys, who were waiting in the library, and sent Celia to Magdalen after giving a peremptory order that at all costs her strength and courage must be sustained. The next moment, with his eyes upon the clock, he was helped on with his astrakhan coat by Rate, and the K.C., with Marston Gurney, who asked if he might accompany him as far as the house, was travelling at top speed in a taxi-cab to Devonshire Place to keep his appointment with Mr. Arthur Bragson.

On the way naturally nothing but the terrible charge was spoken of, and the only one of the two to speak was Gurney. He expressed his indignation in no uncertain terms, and his sympathy with Ware was unbounded, as it was, of course, with Magdalen. Adye allowed him to run on, but did not listen. He was far too deep in his own thoughts. Any question which the young fellow chanced to ask him went quite unheeded. When they were not far from the solicitor's house Gurney was expatiating, not only upon the improbability, but the impossibility of Sir Hubert Ware's guilt as demonstrated conclusively by the evidence given at the inquest. And he wondered how any such charge could have come to be formulated.

A concise reply came from Adye, who was sitting well back in the cab. "Inspector Watkin, of course," he said.

"Watkin! That fool!"

"Fool or no fool, he's dragged that lake again, and he's apparently more or less searched the house. We may feel tolerably certain that he communicated his discovery, whatever it was, to headquarters, where coupling it with what they doubtless already knew there, it was considered sufficiently strong to initiate a prosecution. There's my diagnosis for what it's worth."

"But what did they already know, Adye?"

"Ware's financial difficulties."

"Of course that's cruel luck for him, poor chap! But he makes no bones about it. Why, only last evening when we got back from Switzerland he told me himself that he couldn't be humbug enough to pretend that Eustace's death had not altered his position entirely."

"Did he?"

"Yes, and I admired his frankness. He spoke of his relief at not owing a penny in the world."

"How did he make that out?"

"Why, Lady Ware has arranged through her solicitors for the payment of every one of them. He told me so."

Adye turned his head sharply towards him, and paused before he spoke.

"Ah, Marston," he then said, "there's a woman, if you like!"

"By Jove! I should think so indeed. She didn't mention that to you?"

"Not a word," replied the K.C. "It's just one of those things she would leave out."

They then stopped at Mr. Bragson's door, and before he got out Adye asked Gurney if he remembered any letter from Ware to Hanover being sent that afternoon.

"Certainly, I do," answered the other. "Sir Hubert spoke of it at the inquest. He had written it himself, and earlier in the day had asked me if it would do. It was to ask the family to look after Eustace, and all that. I remember, too, I couldn't make the envelope stick down. So I sealed it with Sir Hubert's ring. I recollect it perfectly."

"Good. It's a big point for Ware."

"By Jove, it is! It ought to be overwhelming with the evidence that on that afternoon he was with you and Lady Ware in the library, and directly afterwards he joined us at croquet. By the way, Adye, I suppose you'll go into the box as well as Lady Ware to speak to that."

"I can't," answered the K.C., "I'm going to defend him."

Gurney had not time to show his delight. The next instant Adye had jumped out of the taxi-cab and rung the front-door bell. He then hurriedly returned to Gurney, and

asked him what he proposed to do since he might be some time with Arthur Bragson. Gurney replied that he would wait if the other did not mind; and the bell by then having been answered, Adye entered the house. The young fellow's choice was a very natural one. He was, of course, exceedingly close to the whole tragedy, and apart from that a certain sense of nervous excitement in him was pardonable enough in the circumstances.

Additionally he entertained, perhaps unconsciously, a feeling of some self-importance in possessing the friendship of the most brilliant figure at the Bar, who was about to undertake the defence in what undoubtedly would be an exceptionally sensational case.

As he waited in the taxi-cab, nervously lighting one cigarette after another, many thoughts rushed through his mind. Firstly, he reviewed in order the events of that ghastly afternoon at Wilbury, his conversation through the telephone with Sir Hubert's stockbroker, his interview with Eustace Ede, who showed his terror of the wasps, Lady Ware's communication to him and Celia that his post of secretary would have to be abandoned, Sir Hubert's merry game of tennis with Sir Henry Egerton, who, as Chief of the Criminal Investigation Department, must now be linked up with the prosecution of his friend, his own bathe in the grim lake not very long before Eustace, his taking Sir Hubert's signet ring to seal the letter to Germany, and his talk to him in the heat of the moment of the unfairness of the will of Lady Ware's father, his extraordinary win on "Aeroplane," which had enabled him to alter his whole career, and upon the top of it that awful entrance of Sir Hubert to the library when he could barely announce the calamity.

Then he pondered over the wickedness of the charge, and wondered how any sane man could have made it. It was outrageous. It was farcical. If Adye was right in fixing the responsibility upon Inspector Watkin, the day, at any rate, was near at hand when that individual would be a discredited officer. He would be able to enjoy a little cheap notoriety for the time being, but there would be an appalling Nemesis for the blockhead. Nevertheless it was a heavy price which

had to be paid for his bungling — the mental torture of an innocent man and his wife. Ware's plight, indeed, he could not trust himself to think about too much, though, of course, the wretched man's courage must be buoyed up by the knowledge of his innocence and by the reflection that in this country a miscarriage of justice is a rarity. Magdalen's suffering, too, was terrible for the young man to contemplate. Her dislike of any publicity, and then of all forms for it to take this! The whole thing was inhuman. It must on the face of it be a sheer gamble on the part of the Crown. They were throwing mud, and some would stick. It was a cruelty. The motive was there staring every one in the face. Neither Gurney nor any one else would contest that. But he urged very justly in his mind that such a motive existed in ninety-nine families out of every hundred. Criminal charges, especially charges of murder, cannot be, and are not, brought upon motive alone.

What, then, had Inspector Watkin discovered, if Adye was right in his supposition? What could it possibly be to provide sufficient cause, in addition to the motive, for the start of the prosecution? Gurney was impatient for an answer to that question, and pending its arrival, concluded definitely that, whatever it would prove to be, it could at the most amount to nothing more than so many links in a chain of purely circumstantial evidence. Sir Hubert was to be yet another victim to that!

As the time went on Gurney, with his youthful indignation and excitement, was, in fact, uttering his thoughts aloud, and in the end, quite pardonably perhaps, was listening to his own voice. He saw himself on his legs in his robes with twelve men in a jury-box craning their necks forward and hanging upon every word. Indeed, he was only dragged back to the existence of the taxi-cab by the sudden sight of the driver not far from the open window, who was staring at him open-mouthed.

Meanwhile Michael Adye had been admitted to Mr. Bragson's study. He found the family solicitor there waiting his arrival. He was not in the least like the so-called conventional family solicitor. He did not possess a bald head with

scanty white hair, he did not cultivate large whiskers with a shaved upper lip, he did not wear spectacles, his dress was not antediluvian, and even in his study at his private house there was a total absence of the prehistoric black bag. On the contrary, he was an exceedingly well-groomed man of forty-five, as perfectly dressed as Sir Hubert Ware himself. His thick hair was carefully brushed in the modern fashion; he wore a smartly trimmed moustache, and when Adye walked into the room he found him enjoying an excellent Upmann cigar and a whisky and soda in an easy-chair by a first-rate fire.

While the servant was removing Adye's coat Arthur Bragson offered his friend a whisky and soda which he accepted gladly, together with one of the Upmann cigars. The servant mixed the drink, and Adye sat down by the fire with the lighted cigar between his teeth, and his lower jaw thrust well forward. Bragson knew how set the face could look when something serious was the matter, and that was the expression which Adye was now wearing.

Directly the servant withdrew the solicitor returned to his chair and waited calmly for Adye to speak.

"Bragson, within the last hour," began the K.C., "a terrible thing has happened. They have arrested Ware for the murder of Eustace Ede."

The solicitor puffed out from his mouth a ring of smoke quite composedly.

Adye regarded his unruffled demeanour with some astonishment.

"Ah," was Bragson's only exclamation, which was uttered with remarkable tranquillity.

"Had you heard it already?"

"No."

"But aren't you rather staggered by it—surprised?"

"I'm afraid not. But then nothing surprises me."

"I've only this moment left poor Lady Ware."

"Poor soul! How is she?"

"Oh, how can she be? Apart from her grief, she's horrified and indignant."

"At the charge being made against her husband?"

"Why, yes."

"If anything could surprise me, that might, Adye."

"What do you mean?" asked the K.C., regarding him fixedly.

"Well, I can understand her grief, poor creature! But I'm hanged if I can understand her indignation. She knows him, and I should have thought she would have realized —"

"That he might be capable of murder, Bragson?"

"Or of anything else."

"She's very far from realizing that," continued Adye. "She's horror-stricken, and will combat such a charge against her husband to the last breath in her body."

"Women are wonderful creatures."

"She's begged me to defend him."

"And are you going to?"

"Yes. That is chiefly why I'm here. I wanted to see you without delay."

"Well, of course," proceeded the solicitor calmly, "I can't be in it. It's out of my line altogether, and, besides, a man must have his heart in his case. Mine wouldn't be in this one. I don't mind saying to you what I mean — hanging would be much too merciful an end for Hubert Ware."

"But, Bragson, do you, by any chance, know anything about the merits of this particular case?"

"Nothing at all."

"Well then —" And Adye broke off with a tone of reproach in his voice.

"I know nothing whatever about it except from the account of the inquest."

"But you're not going to tell me that you'd arrest Ware upon that, much less hang him!"

"That's not what I mean. But, Adye, since you're going to defend him, it may become necessary for you to know certain things, so that I shan't be betraying any professional confidence. And I can tell you this of my own knowledge — Ware's a wrong 'un."

No one knew this in one sense more surely than Adye himself, but he meant to keep his own counsel upon that point. He was right in thinking that it was impossible for

Bragson or anyone else but himself to know anything of the transfer affair.

"Many of us can be wrong 'uns in our own way," he answered, "but we needn't necessarily be murderers, damn it!"

"Look here, Adye. That poor woman had to come to see me only to-day to settle a miserable blackmailing affair against her husband. That was what it amounted to. A goodish sum had to be handed over by Lady Ware to keep a woman's mouth shut, who had an inconvenient husband with an eye to the main chance. It was that or an unpleasant scandal. The latter course she said she hadn't the nerve to face. Wrong, I think, but she's peculiarly sensitive in that way, and quixotic, in my opinion. I told her so, but she wouldn't have it. Personally, I'd let the blackguard be exposed altogether, but I repeat — women are wonderful creatures."

Adye's indignation rose within him as he listened to the solicitor, but he contented himself with the remark:

"I knew her life had been a wretched one, but —"

"My dear fellow, this is not an isolated case. And if young Ede hadn't been drowned, one of the most disgraceful bankruptcies of modern times would have filled the papers."

"And now Lady Ware, I understand, has saved him?"

"Absolutely. I did all I could to dissuade her. No good. She's very strong-willed is Lady Ware, and in the whole of this miserable story she's only taken one wise step."

Adye regarded him inquiringly, though from his conversation with Magdalen before dinner he could guess what it was.

"After behaving magnificently towards him financially, she's decided upon a legal separation. It isn't much, but it's something. At any rate, she'll be free of his infernal presence."

"And on the top of that he's now charged with murder," said Adye quietly.

"Well, and may he swing for it!"

"Yes, you're prejudiced, Bragson, and —"

"Ha! So would you be if you knew a tenth of what I know."

"I know quite enough," was Adye's strong answer, and he halted a moment before continuing, "but we've got to be fair. In whatever light you and I may choose to regard him we can at least presume he didn't do this. And knowing what I do about it I don't see how he *could* have done it."

"Well, you've got to defend him, Adye, and if any man can get him off, it's you. But so low is my opinion of the fellow, that I don't mind confessing in these four walls that I hope you won't."

"Oh, but think of his wife," said Adye forcibly. "It seems to me you've forgotten her and what it means to her."

"That's precisely what I'm not forgetting. As a matter of fact, I'm considering her alone. What do you suppose will happen if Ware's acquitted? Remembering what women are, and particularly what this woman is, what do you imagine she'll do? Will there be any legal separation then? Will she turn her back on him directly he's safely passed through an ordeal like that? She believes in his innocence, doesn't she?"

"Fervently."

"Well, there you are! Where would her freedom be then? Would there be anything beyond an existence for her, fettered as she always has been? That's how I'm not forgetting her. But if, on the other hand, Ware was condemned, he'd be condemned because he was guilty, and a damned good thing too. In that way she'd get her freedom. The price would be awful, I know all about that; but do you mean to tell me that a young and beautiful woman like Lady Ware wouldn't get a fresh start, which all of us would give anything to see her have? Why, of course she would! Depend upon it, there's a good chap hidden away somewhere who'd turn up right enough. And by the law of averages, having had the life she's had, she'd get happiness at last. Most of us catch our Blue Bird once in our lives, though we may fail to realize it. And I'll lay you a 'monkey,' Adye, that, if Ware is found guilty, within a couple of years — shall we say? — Lady Ware —"

"Yes, but they've got to find him guilty first. And it's I, if I can, who must stop them doing so."

Adye spoke these words very quietly and slowly, and there was a latent fighting power behind them which Bragson could not mistake. The solicitor then strolled to the table, and mixed for himself another whisky and soda, while Adye remained motionless in his chair, with his cigar let out, engrossed in his own secret thoughts. Bragson, in his cold-blooded way, had unfolded a fresh point of view, and he little knew how it struck home.

"Of course," said the solicitor on returning to his chair, "as regards Ware I admit I'm a prejudiced devil. I know what nobody else knows, and the popularity of the brute sickens me. But, Adye, putting all prejudice aside —"

"Now you're talking."

"Well, putting prejudice aside, you don't believe he did it, eh?"

"Not for a moment," was the other's emphatic answer.

"Well, now, that's interesting. And if he didn't, it's a bit rough to hope he'll hang — what?"

"That's how I'm inclined to regard it," replied Adye sarcastically.

"Splendid! But you know what I mean just now?"

"Of course. You'd hang most people if you had your way, Bragson — politicians into the bargain, eh?" And the solicitor laughed heartily.

"But what have the Crown got hold of, I wonder?" he asked.

"Ah!" exclaimed the K.C. gravely.

"Because, of course, they don't launch these prosecutions for fun."

"Not as a rule. But they make their mistakes sometimes like other people. Anyhow I shall hear before we're many hours older. Meanwhile, knowing this sort of thing is out of your line, I advised Lady Ware to intrust it to Charles Bodsell."

"The best."

"Well, then, do you mind getting on to him at his flat, and asking him if he can run round to see me at Carlos Place in er — twenty minutes' time? It would be better for it to come from you."

"Right."

Bragson went out to the hall to telephone as suggested, while Adye remained alone in the study. He had not to wait long, and during those five short minutes, in whatever way he tried to approach this case, in which he was convinced of his client's innocence, there always returned to him Bragson's point of view. It stood out bold and clear-cut before him. The solicitor little dreamed when he planned out Magdalen's future, pondered Adye, how real his imaginary "good chap" was, who, in a certain contingency, would do his utmost to make that woman happy. He was very far from guessing that he sat only six feet away, and that, whatever the development of the case for the prosecution, he would defend that man as he had never defended any other in all his experience at the Bar, and so, perhaps, uncage his Blue Bird for ever. He had given his word to the woman he loved, and whatever her husband might have been, however great his contempt for him, he had made up his mind, at all events, to the injustice of this terrible accusation, and to establish it before the world.

"Bodsell was at his club," said Bragson on re-entering the room, "but I caught him. He'll be with you in a few minutes. I told him it was urgent."

"Right."

With that Adye rose from his chair, put on his overcoat again, and bade good-night to the solicitor, who saw him out at the front door. There they were greeted by the hoarse yells of newspaper-sellers who were rushing up and down the street, shouting against each other:

"ARREST O' SURRUBERT WARE.

Great Sensation! Speshall."

"Ah, they've got it already, have they?" muttered Adye, as he hurried to his taxi-cab to open the door, which, however, he was intercepted in doing by one of the yellers, who turned the handle for him.

"Paiper, Sir. Arrest o' SurrRubert Ware. Buy one, sir. Gorspel, sir — speshall."

In a few minutes the K.C. arrived at his house in Carlos Place to meet Charles Bodsell, whence Marston Gurney walked across to Bruton Street with instructions from Adye to tell Magdalen that all was going well. At every twenty yards, in Mount Street, Berkeley Square, Bruton Street, outside Magdalen's very door the fiends with the special edition were bawling out the news: "SirrrRubert Ware charged with murder"—"Sensaitional Development"—"Laitest Details — Speshall."

Far into the night they reaped a fine harvest.

All was going well!

CHAPTER XXIII

IT would be no exaggeration to describe it as the biggest sensation afforded to London for many years. Of its kind it was unique. To take murder trials only, there had been several exciting cases within living memory, owing their thrill to one cause or another which lifted them out of the common rut. But whatever the cause, be it wireless telegraphy or any other uncanny invention, or a poison mystery, which is always an attraction, broadly speaking it is the social status of the people involved which gives a real zest to the proceedings and whets the appetite of the sensation-loving public. Here there was a feast for them. A real live baronet was the accused. His supposed victim, or rather his victim, without any qualification in the opinion of those charitable people who invariably make it a rule immediately to assume the guilt of any person once charged, quite regardless of the evidence of which they have not heard a word, was not only a gentleman, but the brother of one of the most beautiful women in England. And she, together with her husband, was a *persona grata* in society.

As we have seen, the inquest had been given, by the Press, unusual prominence, but an approaching murder trial of this *cachet* was a very different affair. It swamped everything else. Politics bored people more than ever. A country called Germany did not exist. A rearrangement of the Cabinet was a matter of sublime indifference to everybody but the successful and the disappointed. A further fall in Consols was regarded with complete equanimity. The starting of a memorial by public subscription to a distinguished man was postponed until more importance could be accorded to it by the papers. Interview-lovers and self-advertisers were seriously curtailed and, to their indignation, shoved into a corner on page 14 without a proper headline. People attending fashionable weddings and funerals and receptions and other amus-

ing functions felt a pang of disappointment in the knowledge that, though they saw to it that the fact was duly chronicled, comparatively few people would read it. And most significant of all, indeed a grave sign of the times, the sale of football editions had fallen off *a little*.

And if at the time of the inquest people everywhere discussed the verdict from their own point of view, how much more animated were the discussions now! Domestic rows were ubiquitous. Indeed, the paterfamilias, with the wife called Elizabeth and the small son called Jack, in order to keep his reason was actually driven into a solitary week-end exile at the seaside. The *enfant terrible* pursued him everywhere in his own home, and started the subject early each morning. He watched him shave regularly, a practice he had of late grown tired of.

"What did I say, father? I knew Sir Hubert Ware did it. I said so all along, didn't I? I told you so."

And the paterfamilias cut himself.

Then again, the wife, of course, would not budge from her original conclusion that Lady Ware had killed the boy herself. She was most emphatic through the open door of her bedroom, and told her son to be silent.

"Jack!" roared the paterfamilias, "clear out! And you, Elizabeth, with whom it's impossible to argue about anything reasonably, wait till that wretched woman gives her evidence at the trial. Damn it, the man's not shown what his defence is yet!"

"I know that, George, but I believe she did it."

It was hopeless, and the paterfamilias bolted by the Granville express to Ramsgate.

This is but one instance. Scores of families were scarcely on speaking terms. Amongst acquaintances and friends, too, there was plenty of discussion, however seemly, and opinion as to the ultimate result of the coming trial was fairly evenly divided. In several clubs bets upon it were exchanged freely.

To account for all this argument and turmoil it must be explained that, after many remands, the proceedings before the magistrate had terminated in the month of December,

some five weeks after Ware's arrest, in the manner foreshadowed to Magdalen by Adye. Sir Hubert Ware was committed to take his trial at the Old Bailey at the January sessions, the alleged murder having been perpetrated at Wilbury which, as we know, was in the county of Middlesex. The case for the prosecution was disclosed fully, but Ware, acting upon the advice of his solicitor, Charles Bodsell, who appeared regularly for him at the Police Court, and skilfully cross-examined the witnesses for the Crown, reserved his defence until the trial.

At the conclusion of the hearing, when the magistrate, in the usual way, informed the prisoner that he was at liberty to say anything he chose, though he was not bound to do so, Ware, who had maintained throughout his ordeal a remarkable fortitude and self-control, stood up bravely in the small dock, and said:

"At this stage I only wish to say that my defence to this cruel charge I intend to reserve until my trial. An appalling chain of circumstantial evidence has been drawn round me, but before God I'm innocent, and I will prove my innocence!"

The words rang out strongly and sincerely in the small packed court, and a sporting element there of considerable size burst forth into loud cheers.

Charles Bodsell had advised him to say as little as possible, but afterwards the solicitor was bound to admit that what he did say he said well; and that, without a doubt, it made a marked impression upon those who heard it.

Magdalen had risen from her seat and was standing close to the dock, and her husband's words were no sooner uttered than, to the discomfiture of his watch-dogs, she thrust her hand forward which he grasped greedily over the iron rail, and only let go at the quick intervention of the gaolers. It was an action on her part which moved every one to pity. It was plain to all that she believed him. Day after day she had attended the Police Court regularly. Ware had sent his entreaties to her through Charles Bodsell to do so. And although these two during the three years had scarcely held a thought in common, and were husband and wife but in

name, the first thing that Ware did every morning when he was brought into court was to cast a quick, anxious glance to see whether Magdalen was there. A look of comfort invariably filled his eyes when he saw that she was. His nerve then appeared to be strengthened. How often has one seen that look in criminal courts! It is in itself eloquent enough to us, but how much more is there behind it than we can ever dream of! It is really only legible to the two who exchange it.

The strain upon a man charged with such an appalling, cold-blooded crime as this must be enormous, but it may be questioned whether the sufferings of the wife, however shamefully he may have treated her, are of a less degree. Day after day Magdalen had sat there listening to the evolution of a painful tale, unfolded by evidence only from the point of view of the prosecution. Ware's financial difficulties, which supplied the powerful motive for the alleged crime, were dealt with by the Crown in the most uncompromising manner. It was established beyond a doubt, in a form most prejudicial to his character, that just before Eustace Ede's death Sir Hubert Ware was faced with bankruptcy, and that subsequently, pending the necessary legal formalities, an arrangement had been come to whereby every creditor would be paid in full. Details upon this part of the case were entered into, some of which, it will not be surprising to hear, redounded in no way to the credit of the prisoner. The publication of them was a torture to Magdalen, although certain documentary evidence showed that in particular circumstances she had behaved as not every wife would have done, that was very poor comfort to her now. The world's admiration of her conduct meant nothing to her.

Its condemnation of her husband did. She was there to protect him. Women are wonderful creatures. Caste and class matter nothing under certain conditions. They are all alike if their protection is asked for. Outside a public-house some brute knocks his woman down, and often in the doing of it maims her for life. But ninety-nine times out of a hundred she begs the magistrate to let him off. Inside

a drawing-room it is the same story. A gentleman of culture may twist his wife's wrists, or make her existence a hell by some other subtle form of legal cruelty. But put him in jeopardy of his life, and she will fight for it till she drops, and swear that it was a lie.

And in Magdalen's case, as in most others, it amounted to this — that she, within her own four walls, could attack her husband, but anyone outside them had better not attempt to. She knew what her life had been. But to whatever depth of humiliation and wretchedness he had brought her, he was innocent here.

She had had, then, to endure the publication of much of the story in spite of all her fervent hopes that it might never be known. And it was a relief to her when that portion of the case was disposed of, no matter how extraordinary the remainder of the story might be. The evidence already given at the inquest was repeated. The two doctors spoke in precisely the same tones as before, referring to their notes made at the time of their examination of the body; Durnwell attached his customary importance to "them weeds," and was as repetitious and prolix as ever; and Paterson had not changed in the meantime, though now he felt more sure that the man he saw in the punt from half a mile away was wearing a light suit — a point which Charles Bodsell was not slow to pounce upon, since at the inquest he had stated positively that it was impossible for him to say whether the suit was light or dark.

But the dramatic turn in the proceedings came through the evidence of Inspector Watkin, who, as Michael Adye had guessed, was at the bottom of all the mischief. The tale which he unfolded was a remarkable one, and it was upon his later discoveries at Wilbury that the prosecution was launched.

It may be remembered that he was summoned to Whitehall to see the Director of Public Prosecutions concerning a burglary case, and that he attended the interview, at which Sir Henry Egerton was present, in a very dejected frame of mind. It also may not be forgotten that, while the inspector

was packing his papers in his bag, Egerton in speaking of the Wilbury affair told the Director casually that Ware had a mania for criminology, and actually entered in a book-diary every crime as he read it. The remark at the time did not make much impression upon the Director, who had met amateur criminologists before, but it did upon the inspector. He, however, kept it to himself, and thought about it strenuously on his way home. It is more than likely that if he had heard that Sir Hubert collected stag-beetles or indulged in any other hobby he would have thought about it just as much, for the Wilbury case was an obsession with him; and if his importance at the inquest was considerable, its short life was deplorable, and he would spare no effort to resuscitate it. In fact, Watkin, though his rubicund appearance and loud voice belied him, was virtually a desperate man. His conversation in the day was limited to clues, he dreamed of clues at night, and not seldom disturbed Mrs. Watkin by talking in his sleep of clues. Therefore it was in search of a clue, he could not say what clue, that he paid that further visit to Wilbury, which Mrs. Rate had described in her letter to her husband. He took two of his inferiors with him, and gave to the one careful instructions to drag the lake again in the fatal spot, while he with the other went through the house.

Why he determined upon a second dragging he himself found it difficult to say. The best solution of the decision may possibly be given in his own words afterwards.

"I can't exactly tell, sir," he bawled out to a superior at Scotland Yard, "but the biggest minds get an inspiration sometimes, and this was an inspiration."

Having, then, left the first man in charge of that operation, he wandered with the other from room to room with Mrs. Rate at their heels, who was exceedingly put out by the whole proceeding. Twice she insisted upon them wiping their boots, and during their examination of both her ladyship's bedroom and Sir Hubert's she protested vehemently.

"It's a liberty, Mr. Watkin, that's what it is, and 'er ladyship would be furious if she knew."

"Have no fear, ma'am," shouted the inspector, "Sir Uberty gave me *bête noire* to go where I liked."

Fortunately for Watkin he phrased his explanation in the witness-box in a different way altogether.

Since Mrs. Rate kept inconveniently close to them, Watkin was obliged to whisper to his companion, an accomplishment which at the best of times was exceedingly difficult to Watkin.

"Any books about?" he inquired of the other in Ware's room, with as much *sotto voce* as he could muster.

"Don't see any," was the reply.

"No book-diary?"

"What's that?"

"Well, 'Books I have read,' or anything of that sort?"

"No. A book on Bridge and a French novel, that's all."

Finally they descended to the library, and if books were what Watkin was looking for, it may seem odd that he did not examine that room first, since it was full of them, and possibly save time. But detectives are inscrutable people.

"Now, don't you disturb anything in this room," was Mrs. Rate's order. "I know perfectly well Sir Hubert would never wish that."

"I'll hurt nothing, ma'am," came the stentorian voice. "Rely on me. But as the officer out there is dragging the lake I shall have to wait some time. These chairs look comfortable, so I'll take a seat."

With that last observation he did so, and for some minutes complete silence reigned, Watkin, with outstretched legs, wondering how he could manage to get rid of Mrs. Rate, who in a former existence was probably a limpet.

At last the voice of one of the gardeners outside the front door was heard calling her. She pretended not to hear it for some time, but Watkin informed her of the tiresome persistence of the gardener, and adroitly expressed the hope that Mrs. Rate would rejoin him. He did it, too, with some semblance of gallantry which put the woman off her guard, politely opening the door for her and saying, as she reluctantly passed out—

"You *will* come back, won't you, Mrs. Rate? Do now."

Undoubtedly Watkin was not such a fool as he looked.

He waited in the doorway for a few minutes, and, on overhearing the gardener upon the terrace indignantly expostulating with her about the other officer upsetting his bathing-shed and his boats, was hopeful of a short respite from her presence.

The inspector's movements then became quick and active. He extracted the key from the outside of the library door, which he closed quietly, and turned the lock from the inside.

"Just see that the window's bolted," he said to his companion. "For a few minutes at any rate we'll keep the woman out. Pull down the blinds so that they can't look in, and if we can't see enough I'll switch on the electric light."

The officer did as he was told.

"Now," continued Watkin, "you look at the books on that side, and I'll do the same here. 'Books I have read,' or something like that, is what I am hunting for. It wouldn't be a big book."

"But what use could it be, sir, if we found it?"

"That I don't know," answered Watkin. "With my luck over this affair, probably none, but still, you never can tell. It's just another inspiration of mine, Chalmers, and it's the last card I shall play."

Rows of books were scanned quickly by the two men on either side of the room, but no result attended their efforts. They merely encountered such volumes as would hold a place in any well-stocked library. Watkin felt that he was doomed to disappointment. With a crestfallen expression he wandered to the Chippendale writing-table, which upon the afternoon of the tragedy had been hurriedly shifted from the middle of the room to allow space for the long oak table from the hall upon which Eustace Ede's body was placed. Since then the writing-table had been restored to its usual position in the centre, and this was where Watkin now found it. But there was next to nothing upon it. Nearly all the nicknacks had been removed, and there was certainly no trace of any book. Every drawer, too, was locked.

'And yet, the inspector thought, this was the most likely place for any diary to be kept. If he only had proper authority for his search he could force the drawers open and ransack them. But he had no authority at all beyond the general permission of Sir Hubert Ware, given very hurriedly on his departure from the house, that he was at liberty to do anything he liked. He cursed his luck, but he must act warily or he might get into trouble. And then, again, it was more than possible that with the removal to London this precious "Book-diary" might also have taken its departure. The only chance against that, the inspector pondered, lay in the fact that the general exodus from Wilbury had been a hurried one, and that in the not unnatural anxiety to quit the place without delay one or two small things might by some good fortune have been forgotten. But it was a case of hoping against hope, he began to fear.

His companion had gone to the window and was looking out from behind the dropped blind.

"That woman coming back?" asked Watkin.

"Not yet," answered Chalmers. "She left the terrace with the gardener just now in the direction of the lake. Fairly put out she seemed, too."

"That's all right."

With that the inspector set himself to think where exactly the writing-table had been removed when the body lay in the room, and he remembered that it was placed against the bookshelves which lined the wall between the fireplace and the door leading to the hall. He then went over to the space quickly, and examined shelf after shelf from the top downwards. Dickens, Thackeray, Fielding, George Eliot, Scott, Beaconsfield — all stared him in the face in their beautiful bindings, but none of them were particularly helpful at the present juncture. As he looked lower down — in fact, at the bottom shelf — there was a number of very large books, too high to stand perpendicularly like the others, lying horizontally one upon the other, the topmost being an edition of the "Times Atlas" bound in pale green. Between this and the next shelf there was a gap, and for some quite unaccount-

able reason it attracted Watkin's attention. Indeed, without knowing why, he pulled out the atlas, and when it was almost entirely removed from its position he saw lying carelessly upon the far side of it a small thin book with a brown morocco cover. He took it in his hand, pushing the atlas back, and there in gold letters stamped upon it were these words—"Books I have read."

"Give me a light," he called out.

And Chalmers turned the switch of the lamp upon the writing-table.

Watkin hurried to it with the book, which he examined eagerly.

"Yes," he said excitedly, "Sir Hubert's name in it, and this year's. January, February, March,—yes, plenty of books entered. Now, what about September?" And he turned over the leaves as fast as he could. "September, September, September—Yes, here we are—September. What about the 10th?—No, no entry. Anything on the 9th, then? Yes! What does it say now? What does it say?" He struggled to read the writing and then exclaimed! "French Crimes, Vol II., page 285, The Farm Pond Murder!"

"By Jove, that's rum," said Chalmers.

"Yes, there's something curious in this! Where's the volume? Seen anything like 'French Crimes' on your side?"

"Stop a bit. I'm not sure I didn't."

"Look again, then, quick!"

Chalmers returned to a portion of the bookshelves upon the other side of the room, and ran his finger along the volumes. Presently he called out to Watkin:

"Yes, here they are. Three volumes."

"Bring me the second. That's all we want."

Chalmers brought the book across to him, and the inspector turned at once to page 285.

"Yes, here we are," he said. "'The Farm Pond Murder.' It's not long."

But at that moment Chalmers ran to the window, and

looked out again. "Look out, sir," he whispered, "Mrs. Rate's coming back along the terrace."

"Right. Stick that into your overcoat pocket." And he handed him the "Book-diary." "I'll put this into mine." And he quickly concealed "French Crimes." "And now fill up the gap you took the volume from. Spread the other books out, and no one'll notice."

Chalmers did as he was told, while the inspector extinguished the electric lamp, drew up the blinds, and unlocked the door, placing the key as before upon the outside.

Everything was accomplished just in time. A moment later Mrs. Rate returned to them to find the room as she left it, with the inspector almost asleep in his easy-chair and Chalmers in another.

"Well, you *'ave* deserted us, Mrs. Rate, but better late than never, eh?" said Watkin with the noisiest yawn that ever was yawned.

"Yes, it was that man of yours with 'is draggin'. The gardener took me down to see with my own eyes the mess 'e's made of the shed."

She went on to explain volubly how the gardener would have to tidy up again after him, and that she would complain to Sir Hubert.

But Watkin received it all very good-temperedly, and assured the woman that the shed would be left by his man as he found it!

"I'll go down and see to it myself," he added.

Mrs. Rate was relieved to find that the intruders were actually anxious to leave the house. The surprise pacified her considerably, and she deigned to shake hands with the inspector upon the terrace.

"Yes, it's no use your comin' here again," she said, "you'll never find out anythin', as I've always said."

Watkin and Chalmers shook their heads sadly, and, after leaving Mrs. Rate at the front door, and subsequently, by the aid of half a crown, completely satisfying the gardener, went down in the direction of the bathing-shed to join their companion.

When, however, they were hidden from the house by the steep descent of the ground, Watkin sat down upon the seat which poor Eustace Ede had occupied before his bathe. He then took out the "French Crimes" from his pocket to skim through "The Farm Pond Murder," while Chalmers by his side lighted his pipe, and wondered if the inspector was really "on a good thing."

Not many minutes passed before Watkin slapped his knee excitedly with the book and said: "It's the same — identical almost!"

"What do you mean?" asked Chalmers.

"Why, this story and the end of Eustace Ede. It's the same almost to every detail."

"What!"

"Yes, the only difference is that in the book it's a sister who's drowned by her brother. Otherwise identical. Motive — money; everything the same except that they arrested and sentenced the wrong man, a farm hand, whose head was only just saved in the nick of time by the gent giving 'imself up. Caused a commotion in Paris, that did. My eye! So will this in London if we can bring it 'ome. What a chance for *me*! What a chance for *us*, Chalmers!"

"Yes, sir, but that won't be enough for 'eadquarters to move upon — a coincidence."

"Damned funny coincidence, though," replied Watkin, whose red cheeks had turned to purple with excitement. "It may put us on the right scent. It's a start, anyway! What price my inspiration, eh?"

They had risen from their seat by then, and soon reached the bathing-shed, where they arrived in time to see the third man rowing to the bank, his dragging operations being finished. When he had moored his boat to the stake the inspector approached him with a tread which fairly shook the ground for fifty yards round.

"Any luck, Burton?" he asked.

"Well, some, sir. This ring."

Watkin took it quickly and examined it.

"*Some* luck you say, do you? Why, it's Sir Hubert

Ware's!" he gasped out. "His signet ring. I've seen it on his finger often!"

"Are you sure, sir?" asked Chalmers in amazement.

"Certain. Look! Here's his monogram. I tell you we've done the trick! That ring caused the abrasion on the boy's forehead, or my name ain't Watkin. Where actually did you find it, Burton?"

"Just about the same spot, sir."

After that he enjoined the strictest silence on the other two who would have, each of them, Watkin was careful to explain, a big feather in their caps, and the three returned to the police station.

Without any delay the inspector visited Scotland Yard, the Director of Public Prosecutions was seen, Dr. Winter gave it definitely as his opinion that the ring by means of a blow might have caused the contusion and abrasion on the forehead, and upon the very evening Sir Henry Egerton was due to dine with the Wares this new evidence, coupled with a powerful motive, was, after much anxious thought, considered sufficient to justify the application for a warrant for Sir Hubert Ware's arrest.

This, then, was the narrative put into the form of evidence by Inspector Watkin at the police court, which created a great stir. Only one detail need be added to it, and that concerns the ring.

Ware, through Charles Bodsell, did not for a moment dispute that it was his. And a further piece of evidence given by the officer, who searched the prisoner upon his arrival at the police station, was to the effect that he was wearing upon the little finger of his right hand a ring which he produced, and which resembled strikingly the one which had been found in the lake.

That it was a case of circumstantial evidence only, Ware was, no doubt, correct in asserting, but it was a somewhat extraordinary one, and it was, perhaps, not unnatural that it should provoke much discussion and speculation.

Furthermore, this was the story which Magdalen had to

listen to and endure. But she did listen to it and she did endure it. She never flinched. And after she had grasped her husband's hand upon his committal, she walked unaided from the court with that exquisite dignity which she never had to assume, believing implicitly in his innocence.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE prolonged nervous tension had told upon Magdalen severely. Her London doctor and her friends were extremely anxious about her. A collapse seemed imminent and between the police court proceedings and the trial her removal from London was deemed imperative if she ever was to be expected to give her evidence on her husband's behalf, which was considered by her advisers to be vital to him.

Consequently, after much persuasion and entreaty, she was accompanied, only by her maid and her devoted little friend, Celia, to a small restful nook upon the Devonshire coast with the peremptory order of the doctor to remain there in absolute quiet without a newspaper of any kind until the commencement of the trial, four weeks hence. It is doubtful whether the departure could have been accomplished at all had not a piece of information concerning her husband been discreetly withheld from her.

Ware awaited his trial in prison, and, like all prisoners charged with the capital offence, he was lodged in the infirmary so as to be always, day and night, under supervision. But, as events proved, it was the only place fit for him. An epidemic of influenza had broken out, and Ware, who was doubtless weakened by his terrible mental strain, fell a victim to it within a few hours of his committal for trial. He was most carefully watched and nursed, but his attack became serious, and pneumonia supervened, with the result that for some days his life hung in the balance. Fortunately, or unfortunately, however, he weathered the storm. He became convalescent, and was at length permitted by the medical officer to resume his interviews with his legal adviser, who, in the circumstances, had been unable to see him since the termination of the hearing before the magistrate.

Accordingly, upon the day after the Law Courts rose for the Christmas vacation, Michael Adye, tired from his heavy work throughout the term, was sitting in his chambers in King's Bench Walk in conference with Charles Bodsell, who informed him of this message from the prison, and that he had arranged to visit him upon that afternoon.

Not a man in England yearned for a holiday so much as Adye did. Indeed, had he not been blessed with a constitution of iron, the strain of his parliamentary work and his huge practice at the Bar would in all probability have meant for him either Kensal Green or a madhouse. But a holiday was out of the question with the Ware case at hand. It was the heaviest responsibility ever cast upon him.

The public, however, regarded it all from a very different point of view. Only sensation and excitement appealed to them. And their interest in the coming trial, which was "the best" they had ever had, was undoubtedly not lessened by the announcement that Sir Hubert Ware was to be defended by "M.A.," and the prosecution led by the Attorney-General. The news created fresh discussion. Really, it was most accommodating of it to turn up in the Christmas holidays. It was argued by some that the Crown must be a little doubtful as to a conviction, or they would not have retained the Attorney-General. This opinion, however, was challenged by others, who maintained that in a case of such importance the services of one of the Law Officers was a foregone conclusion. Then, as regards Michael Adye, while there was absolute unanimity as to Ware having secured the first advocate at the Bar, there were various deductions drawn. One was that Adye would not, under any conditions, have undertaken the defence unless he was able to put a strong one before the jury. "He has too much to lose, has 'M.A.' He never would fight a case, my dear chap, if he hadn't a real good sporting chance of winning it." And the other was that he was a personal friend of Ware's, and could not very well get out of it. Thus did conjecture flourish. And all the wiseacres and all the armchair critics little imagined the true reason for Adye's step, nor guessed its extreme simplicity — a man will

do anything for a woman. Neither did they realize, as they never do realize, a tittle of what it means to an advocate to have to defend a man for murder. They see him in court in his wig and gown, apparently self-possessed and happy, giving a friendly nod here and another there as he recognizes the face of a friend, asking the judge calmly if he proposes to sit later than five, as he has fixed a consultation for five-thirty in another case, joining in the laughs at an amusing witness, or even at one of those legal jokes which are devoid of all humour, momentarily removing his wig to scratch his head when a deadly piece of evidence is given — a habit which, probably, only his wife could tell was a sure sign of his nervousness.

But they have no knowledge of the man in his solitude — how the case takes hold of him, the obsession that it becomes, his anxious days, his disturbed nights, one false step and his client's fate sealed, the life of a fellow creature depending upon his skill.

All this was Michael Adye suffering, and at the back of his mind all the time was his knowledge of his client's character, however innocent he might be of the ghastly charge of murder, done, if done at all, in the most cold-blooded and deliberate manner. It was, indeed, a tremendous responsibility. But all his brain and might were in it for the sake of the woman he loved.

For nearly an hour the brilliant advocate had sat there with Charles Bodsell, the keen-faced solicitor of forty-seven, who in the Criminal and Divorce courts had established an unrivalled reputation. Hundreds of difficult and sensational cases had been discussed at consultations in that room, but the galaxy of caricatures of judges and barristers upon the walls had never listened to a more difficult or more sensational case than this. Nor did all the rows of law reports in their light brown leather bindings contain one to surpass it. They had hammered out the story point by point — the strange circumstantial case against Ware, and their line of defence. They had exhausted every detail, and they both felt what an enormous deal would depend

upon the way Ware gave his evidence and stand the cross-examination of the Attorney-General.

"Well, if he cuts as good a figure as when he protested his innocence before the magistrate," said Bodsell, "he'll be all right. There was such a note of sincerity about it that —"

"Oh, yes, I think we can trust him to keep his head," added Adye quietly. "But that ring, you know." And he shook his head slowly.

"Devilish awkward."

He rose from his chair and paced the room with his hands tightly linked behind his back.

"And, of course, the prosecution will work the prejudice against him over the shady way he squandered his money for all it's worth. Let us hope they'll overdo it."

"That's where Lady Ware's so fine," said the solicitor. "For a wife to have had to endure all that, but to stand by him in this —!"

"Ah, a noble creature that, my dear Bodsell. It isn't given to everybody to differentiate between sin and crime."

"She'll make a tremendous effect in the box, I'm certain. By Jove! What a lovely woman!"

"But, you know," interrupted the K.C. quickly, as he continued his nervous walk, "what I wish we could get hold of is some strong, independent witness who could establish the man's innocence up to the hilt. We've got a certain amount of evidence — a letter to Germany and so on — but I should like to have more, Bodsell, much more, because, although you and I may believe that he's the victim of a hideous conglomeration of circumstances, we must never lose sight of the fact that, whatever the ignorant public may think, strong circumstantial evidence in cases like this is the most powerful evidence of all. It's hanged many a man. And I'm not a bit happy yet — not a bit."

At that moment the clerk entered the room and closed the door.

"Yes?" inquired Adye shortly.

"There's a man just come, sir, who says he must see you immediately."

"Well, tell him to go away. I'm engaged."

"That's what I did, sir, but he won't take No for an answer. He says it's about the Ware case, and declares that he can establish Sir Hubert Ware's innocence."

Adye and Bodsell were startled by the information, and looked at each other curiously.

"Does he appear to be sane or —?" asked Adye.

"Oh, quite, sir. He's all right like that."

"Who is he?"

"He wouldn't give his name, sir. But he swears he can prove Sir Hubert Ware never did it, and that he means to go into the box to say so."

"Well, it would be more in order if he saw Mr. Bodsell first at his office. Tell him that, and give him the address."

The clerk opened the door, but was stopped by Bodsell, who said: "I could see him at my office at four, if he came then."

But before the clerk had time to leave, the door was pushed open from the other side, and Tommy Bold stood in the room.

"Mr. Adye, there can be no delay here, sir," he cried huskily, trembling from head to foot, "there's an innocent man on trial for his life, and I can't wait. I want, sir, to tell you what I know. I—I was at Wilbury on the day the brother-in-law was drowned. I—I saw it!"

There was great emotion in the broken man's voice, and he reeled with exhaustion against a chair, while the two lawyers each took a step back in amazement.

"What's the matter? Are you ill?" inquired Adye.

"Very, sir," was the whispered answer. "I'm a doomed man, sir, but before I go I want to save—a good friend's life."

"Sit down."

The man sank weakly into the chair, and Adye turned to the clerk. "All right, William, you needn't wait," he said.

The clerk retired from the room, and Adye seated himself slowly at the head of his large writing-table, Bodsell standing on his left.

The bookmaker was very short of breath, and from his

emaciated look it was plain to the two shrewd observers, who watched him eagerly, that his doom was consumption. He had wasted terribly since his September visit to Wilbury, when little enough was left of the once prosperous man. Now was scarcely recognizable.

"I'm all right now, sir," he said at length.

"Do I understand you want to make some statement?" asked Adye.

"Yes, sir."

"I'll take it down in shorthand," said Bodsell, as he sat at the side of the table.

"Take your own time," said the K.C. gently.

"Well, sir, I'm Tommy Bold, the bookmaker that once was, and I've known Sir Hubert some years. He always paid his bets, and he'll tell you I was always straight with him. But I fell on bad days, sir, and — and everything — went wrong."

His weak voice fell to a whisper again, and throughout his narrative he spoke with great difficulty and under considerable emotion.

"I — I was near starving, sir, and last September the tenth, not knowing which way to turn, I tramped by road — to Wilbury. I knew Sir Hubert had a kind heart, and — and I asked him for help. There's — there's a gentleman who was there that can bear me out, too. The butler gave me his name — Mr. Gurney, and — and —"

"Quite right," interrupted Adye quickly. "Wait a moment, my good man. Get your breath."

With that the K.C. opened the door hurriedly, and instructed his clerk to ring up Mr. Gurney at Pump Court and ask him to come across at once. He also mixed some brandy and water from a cupboard and handed it to the bookmaker, who muttered his thanks and gulped some of it down. It evidently revived the wretched creature, but Adye told him not to continue his story until Mr. Gurney came. He obeyed the order submissively, and the bent figure remained huddled in the chair with his eyes staring glassily in front of him.

Before two minutes had passed Marston was in the room.

"You want to see me, Adye?" he said.

But before the K.C. could answer, the bookmaker cried hoarsely: "That's the gentleman, sir. That's him!"

Gurney was startled by the voice, and looked inquiringly at the man, whose altered appearance did not come back to him at once.

"I'm Tommy Bold, sir. Don't you remember me, sir?"

"Why, of course," replied Gurney. "You came to see Sir Hubert Ware at Wilbury"—and he turned to Adye—"on the day of the tragedy."

"Yes, sir, and—and I've come now—to save his life."

Gurney stepped back in amazement, and, after an explanation of the situation from Adye, took his seat near the others, and listened to the completion of the story, nodding in corroboration of those details to which he also was able to speak.

"Well, sir, I asked Sir Hubert for help, and, by God, he helped! No half-crown or five bob, but a five-pound note!"

Bold shook with emotion as he told this, and a violent fit of coughing stopped him.

"Perfectly true," interrupted Gurney, "and it must have been his last fiver in the world!"

"Well, sir, then—then he sent me along to get some food, and ordered me a pint of champagne. I told him I'd never forget his goodness, and I haven't, and I—I never shall, sir!"

"And then?" was the quiet question from Adye, who was anxious for more, and wanted to keep him to the point.

"He also told me to have a stroll in the grounds after my meal before I returned to London, and it was in that way, sir, that I saw what proves his innocence—"

The K.C. leaned forward over the table, and an expression of avidity came into his eyes. Bodsell and Gurney, too, hung upon his words; and while the bookmaker swallowed with difficulty, gathering his strength to complete the narrative, there was a tense stillness in the room.

"I went out into the garden, sir, and wandered about a bit in the park till I came to—the lake. And—and within, say, a couple of hundred yards of the boathouse—it looked like a boathouse, sir—"

"Yes, yes!" came quickly from Adye.

"Well, sir, I was sleepy like—the food and the wine—well, I'd been strangers to both for some time—I curled myself up under a tree in the shade, and I suppose I dozed off, sir. But—but presently I woke, and in the distance I saw a young gentleman—fair and thin—with a towel, I thought it was, round his neck come to the boathouse."

"Do you remember how he was dressed at all?"

"A light suit, sir, and he had—one of those—Trilby hats on—white it looked."

"Quite right," said Adye in an excited whisper. "Had you ever seen him before?"

"Never in my life."

"And then?"

"Well, sir, he went into the boathouse."

"Alone?"

"Quite alone. I didn't think anything of it at the time. And then presently he came out again just as he was—and— and walked to the punt at the side. He unchained it from the bank—"

"Can you swear to that?"

"Yes, sir, I can," was the determined reply. "And then he got into the punt and shoved it off with the pole—"

"Well?"

"And I remember as he did so he lost his—balance, and—and slipped—"

"Slipped badly, do you mean?" asked Adye eagerly. "Think!"

"Well, sir, he fell forwards on—on his knee—and I thought he knocked his head somehow against the—the edge of the punt. I—I saw him—just put his hand—against his—"

"His forehead, Bold?" was the keen question.

"Well, sir, somewhere—over his eye—I thought."

"Go on!"

"But it didn't seem to—upset him—very much. Then he shoved off a little way out, sir, and stopped. Then he seemed—to stand still a bit—and—and look at the water—as if hesitating. Then I see him bend low down right

over the side. I—I—I couldn't tell exactly what it was he was doing, but it—it struck me as if he was feeling the water—to—to see if it was cold. To be truthful, sir, I didn't think much about it."

"And after that?"

"He came back in a minute or two to the bank, and got out of the punt."

"Did he chain it up again? Think very carefully."

"No, sir, I don't think he did. I—I didn't see him do so."

Bodsell looked up from his shorthand notes at Adye, who uttered a sigh of relief.

"He seemed a bit hurried like then, sir, and went into the boathouse."

"But did you see no more of him?"

"Oh, yes, sir. In a few minutes he came out on the landing stage as he was with his clothes on and sat down by the steps, and after a little while he got up and disappeared into the boathouse again. Then a few minutes later I saw him in his bathing suit go down the steps into the water."

"You saw that distinctly?"

"Distinctly, sir."

"And was he alone?"

"Quite, sir!"

"You're sure?"

"Positive."

"Could you have recognized Sir Hubert if he'd been there?"

"Why, of course I could, sir. But he wasn't there. I'll swear to that on my oath!"

And the man with some nervous strength banged one hand upon the other.

"After the young fellow entered the water," continued Adye, concealing his excitement, "did he swim, or what?"

"Yes, sir, he—he went a little way out—not far; and just about then I got up from under the trees, brushed my clothes a bit, and walked off to the station. I wasn't thinking anything about it. The—the—the young, gentleman,

I suppose — was enjoying — just his ordinary dip. But just before I started on my walk I remember I did look round, but the young gentleman wasn't there any more, and if I thought anything I thought he'd gone back into the boat-house."

"And then you went to the station and back to London?"

"Yes, sir."

"And during that time you're certain you saw nobody else but —"

"But — but the young gentleman, sir. I'll swear to it!"

The bookmaker fought again for breath, and lifting the glass from the floor with his shaking hand, drank off the rest of the brandy and water.

Gurney whispered excitedly to Bodsell, and Adye once again paced the room from the fireplace to the window, and from the window to the fireplace. He stopped there and flung a big coal upon the fire. Then he turned his eyes upon the bookmaker and said in an exceedingly quiet tone:

"Of course you've told us a very remarkable story which should go far towards establishing Sir Hubert Ware's innocence, but why haven't you told it before?"

Tommy Bold looked at him furtively, but no answer came.

"Sir Hubert befriended you, you say," continued the K. C. "He was good to you — remarkably good, it seems to me, when one knows his circumstances at the time."

"He was, sir," cried the bookmaker. "He was a tip-topper, he was!"

"Then why have you allowed all these weeks to go by since his arrest before telling this story?"

"Must I — must I answer that, sir?" and the tears rushed to the man's eyes.

"I'm afraid you must," was the gentle answer.

The bookmaker hung his head and jerked out the words:

"Because, sir, since October — I've — I've been in prison — at Stafford — two months hard — for — for stealing — to — to — to keep alive. And I never heard — a word of it — till I came out two days ago. I — I came — I — came as fast as I could then, sir. Don't say I'm too late, sir! Don't say I'm too late!"

He shook from head to foot, and had a paroxysm of crying which moved the three listeners to pity.

"Steady, man, steady," said Adye, sympathetically, as he placed a hand on his wasted shoulder. "Mr. Bodsell here will see that you're comfortably looked after during the case. I think you need a doctor too."

Bodsell quickly took out a visiting card, handed it to Tommy Bold, and putting some silver into his hand, told him to drive at once to his office and wait for him.

He staggered to his feet and shuffled to the door, where he turned.

"I thank you kindly, sir," he said. "I haven't much longer here, sir. I know that." That was the prison doctor's parting shot. "But before I go I mean to save Sir Hubert! Then the sooner I pop off the better."

The next instant he was gone.

"What time, Bodsell, are you due at the prison to see Ware?" asked Adye rapidly, as he pulled out his watch.

"Two-thirty."

"We'll lunch at the club, then, and go on together."

"You'll see him with me?"

Bodsell's surprise was not unnatural. It is somewhat rare for a counsel to visit his client in prison in this way.

"Yes," answered Adye thoughtfully.

"Right."

"But, Bodsell, communicate at once with the prison at Stafford, and ascertain, without giving anything away, if this man was there, and if he did only come out two days ago. Also get from Bold what hour, about, he left Wilbury station for London. We must see if we can have that corroborated. The man's history is shaky, and it must be backed up if possible."

"It's an amazing bit of luck, though," cried Gurney.

"Yes," said Adye; "the independent witness we were longing for, and corroborated largely by you, Marston! A bolt from the blue! Not a word to a soul!"

CHAPTER XXV

THERE was a fair sprinkling of members of the club at luncheon, and Michael Adye and Charles Bodsell attracted some curiosity as they sat at their table. Indeed, there were few men in the room who were not discussing the Ware case. To be strictly accurate, there were only two who were not doing so. They were Adye and Bodsell. They enlarged upon many topics — the latest novel, the best play, the coming pantomime, politics, golf, hunting, shooting, flying, Monte Carlo, Bridge, cigars, wine. But "shop" was barred. And they were delighted to meet any friend who belonged to any profession but their own. It was a blow to the waiters. They had hovered round the K.C.'s table assiduously for half an hour. In fact, Adye remarked to his companion that the service at the club had distinctly improved.

"See that man over there by the last window?" said a struggling young barrister to a new dramatic author who had lately been elected. "Know who he is?"

"No. Strong face, though."

"That's the great 'M.A.'!"

"Michael Adye! The devil it is. By Jove! I always thought he was much fairer than that."

"Wonderful chap. How the deuce he manages to get through his work I can't think. It's simply colossal. Ever heard him?"

"No, never. Fine speaker — oh, fine."

"He'll be tremendous in the Ware trial. Just his case. I'd go miles to hear it. An extraordinary story, that."

"He looks happy enough about it, doesn't he? I suppose though, a fellah like that with one big case after another grows pretty callous. The same as the surgeon, I take it? It's all just a case with a huge fee at the end of it."

Then at another table were seated two old friends in the fifties, the one happily married, the other miserably:

"I often wonder Michael Adye doesn't marry. Why doesn't he, now?"

"Too clever."

"Hallo! There's the Attorney-General. My word! There'll be a battle between those two at the Old Bailey next month."

And it was the Attorney-General who, on receiving a wave of the hand from Adye, strolled to his table to speak to him. Every man in the room was interested to see the two great antagonists together. The waiters hovered round the neighbourhood more assiduously than ever. This is what they heard for their pains:

"How are you, Michael? Going south?"

"No, old man — stuck in town. Are you?"

"Not so far, but a few days in Paris will see me, I hope. Have you just finished lunch?"

"Yes. I recommend the *filet de bœuf*. Excellent! Good-bye, Johnny."

Adye and Bodsell then made their way to the smoking-room, and decided that there was just time for a cigar and coffee and old brandy. Ten minutes later they were in a taxi-cab on their way to Ware's prison. They were at business again.

"There's one thing we've got to be thankful for," said Adye with a grunt. "I heard just now before I left the Temple that old Burrock, by the mercy of Providence, is going circuit and won't try the case."

"The gods are on our side, then."

"Yes, the fact of Ware, a married man, being mixed up with another woman, apart from the ugly financial side of it, would have been quite enough for Burrock. He'd have hanged him for a 'monkey.'"

"Who will the judge be, then?"

"Dick Petworth, thank heaven! — a man of the world."

"Splendid! That'll be another good bit of news for Ware. I say, the poor devil will be fairly staggered when he hears about Tommy Bold."

"Ye-e-s," said Adye between his teeth, which held his half-smoked cigar. "Do you think the bookie did it, Bodsell?"

"No," laughed out the other heartily. "Why, do you?"

"Oh, you never know. Been in gaol — Damned bad record — Dying man obviously — Conscience, and all that."

"But with what object?"

"Well, the wretched devil was on his beam ends."

"Yes, but he would have bagged the money. And look at all there was found on young 'Ede."

"Yes, of course. That's true."

"And Ware had just given him a fiver."

"I was only wondering — just turning it over. But you know, Bodsell," and he spoke slowly and perplexedly, "I can't get away from one feeling. It's always coming up against me. I believe it was murder by some one or other."

"In spite of the bookie's story?"

"Of course there's that, and so far he tells it all right. But the doctors' evidence! Those marks upon the throat, and the bruise and abrasion on the forehead caused by a blow possibly, they say, from that infernal ring. I should like to be able to smash up that medical evidence. And there's only one possible way, however far-fetched it may be, that I can see. I was worrying it out last night."

"What's that?" asked Bodsell eagerly.

"Well, by the theory of suicide. I shall use that unfinished letter from the boy to Lady Ware with that object, where he expresses his regret, and wishes he wasn't so useless — some words like that, and speaks of the money."

"Yes; but, on the other hand, he speaks of dividing it on his return from Germany, so that he had it in his mind to start on the journey."

"My dear fellow, how do we know *what* he had in his mind? I'm raising it as a defence, don't you see? That's all. It can be argued quite differently by the prosecution. No one knows that better than I do. But the thing, if we can, is to raise a doubt in that jury's mind. And remember, the man's on trial for his life, and if that doubt can once be raised fairly feasibly, there are precious few juries that are

not jolly thankful to seize it. To start with, the letter is rather a curious one; a bit wild and despondent and all that, *and* it's unfinished. Don't lose sight of that. How do we know that, being in that frame of mind, he didn't chuck the pen down and go to that lake and end it. Why, with the feeling of regret on him, couldn't he have thought that it would be better for every one if his sister had all the money? And he was a weakling at the best, you know."

"But the finger-marks on his throat, Adye?"

"In the circumstances mightn't they have been self-inflicted — in the water, say, when he wanted to drown? He might have done that at the moment when Tommy Bold looked away. He was in a wretched state of mind, and he might have grown desperate at that moment. And then, being a poor swimmer, and so on — Mind you, I'm only raising it as a defence in a murder trial. It may be a weak one. It is an appallingly weak one, but it might just go down. It's only a bare possibility we want when we can back it up with the bookie's story, and the rest of the evidence. It'll need working out carefully, of course. But one thing the doctors certainly can't say. They can't by any stretch of imagination say those finger-marks are Ware's. They were much too blurred."

"Then the blow on the forehead?"

"My dear Bodsell, if in cross-examination I can't get those two doctors to admit the possibility of it having been caused by contact with the edge of that punt when he fell, I'll retire from the Bar."

"Devilish ingenious."

"I don't say we shall get him off, but there's a lot for us to meet, and we're bound to meet it all as well as we can."

"How shall you handle Tommy Bold?"

"Bold? The first thing I shall get from him when he goes into the box will be that he's just come out of gaol and the reason he went in. My dear fellah, every single bit of wind that I can steal from the sails of the prosecution I shall steal."

Adye took off his hat, threw away his cigar, and yawned prodigiously. He remained silent for a few minutes, and

with his thoughts in Devonshire dozed off to sleep. The man was tired. Bodsell made a remark or two, but no agreement or disagreement with it was given, and after putting a question to the K.C. which elicited no response, he realized that he might have spared himself the trouble. As he regarded Adye, almost lying down in the taxi-cab, with his strong chin resting well down upon his chest and his lips firmly closed, he was struck by the immense power of the head. He knew him well privately, and, of course, had been frequently associated with him in important cases. And although he had often remarked upon the intellect and strength in the countenance, which showed themselves abundantly when engaged in his work, he had never been so impressed by them as at this moment. He saw what all of us sometimes see in a strong face in its sleep — an exaggeration, or possibly a caricature, of its intensity. He was a giant, he thought, one of those magnetic personalities that emerge but seldom. What a chance for Sargent if he could see him now! The massive forehead, the deep-sunk eyes, more deep-sunk than ever with their lids shut down upon them, the finely chiselled nose with its sensitive nostrils, the determined mouth with its powerful lower jaw so attractively underhung — the whole thing a tower of strength; yet all the while so human, a tremendous fighter and a tremendous lover of one woman of whom he was dreaming. He knew the strangely pretty nook in Devonshire, and was largely responsible in selecting it for Magdalen. It possessed a soothing, gentle climate in December, and now in the land of nod it was more strange and beautiful than in reality. The flowers in bloom represented every country in the world. Undoubtedly many of them had never grown in England, and with them the fruit trees were not only laden with their fruit, but with their blossom as well at Christmas! The sea rolled in upon the pebbly beach beneath the ideal garden, and was so accommodating at night as to make no noise and so destroy no sleep. The moon, too, was a fixture. Every evening she was full, and in her bright light Magdalen stood forth radiantly beautiful as the children's queen. She cuddled in her arms a tiny child. And

he had bought it all for six and eight pence! It was his and Magdalen's.

But there is an end to most things.

"We're there, Adye," said Bodsell.

And Adye awoke with a smile of contentment in his eyes to find himself outside the grim portals of one of His Majesty's prisons where Magdalen's husband was.

"Had a nap?" asked the solicitor.

"Forty winks." And he looked up at the tall, grimy walls regretfully: "too short."

The driver was told to wait, and in a few seconds that dread clink of keys and chains was heard, and a warder opened the great door and saluted. They were then escorted by a special officer along an interminable stone corridor. On the way Bodsell asked a question:

"How is Sir Hubert Ware?"

"Gettin' on nicely now, sir," was the cheery answer.

"But he 'ad a sharp attack, sir, and it put us all about. We were afraid that for the first time with us, a prisoner on trial for murder was goin' to slip through our fingers. This'll be the room for your consultation, sir. But I must ask you to wait a moment."

The three then stopped near a door with a glass panel in it, outside which a warder stood, commanding a complete view of the room inside, where another wretched prisoner awaiting trial was interviewing his solicitor.

This was explained to Adye and Bodsell, who, however, were not detained for long. Within a very few moments the door was opened, and the prisoner was escorted back to his cell by the other warder, the solicitor also taking his departure.

Adye and Bodsell were then left in the room to await the arrival of their client. It was a forbidding-looking apartment, with its bare, painted walls, its two windows with their inevitable outside bars and a yard beyond, its long, ugly table and its three or four small yellow wooden chairs, one being placed at either end of it.

"I'm rather dreading this," said Adye, his voice reverberating through the barrack-like room. "I've not seen him

since the night of his arrest at Bruton Street. But leave it entirely to me, Bodsell. I must take him right through the story and cross-examine him."

This was his invariable practice — to cross-examine closely his own client when in consultation. It was often a cross-examination of the most searching description. It was thought by him to be the only way of discovering the weak spots in the case as well as the strong ones. And when his clients entered the witness-box it was fascinating to see how Adye handled them.

Before many minutes had passed they heard steps in the stone-paved corridor through the open door, and Sir Hubert Ware, supported under the elbow by a warder, walked weakly into the room.

The warder indicated a chair at one end of the table for Ware to take, and another at the further end to Adye.

"I'll close the door, sir. But I have to remain outside. I can hear nothing that passes, sir. But I have to *see*."

With that the officer, who had assisted Ware to his seat, left the grim apartment, and closed the door firmly. He was, however, discernible upon the other side of the glass panel. Both Ware and Adye instinctively turned their eyes slowly towards it, and saw the burly figure of the warder watching them. The thoughts of them both at that moment must be left to the imagination.

CHAPTER XXVI

WARE had made the best he could of his appearance in the circumstances. He looked, in fact, strangely incongruous with the ghastly surroundings, and the antithesis of the shabby, down-at-heel wretch who had just quitted the room and passed him in the passage with enormous curiosity. His clothes were carefully thought out in every detail, as usual. He wore a faultlessly cut blue serge suit, patent leather button boots with drab tops, the latest pattern of turn-over collar, a neat black and white bird's-eye tie not needing a scarf-pin, which, owing to the possibility of suicide, was against the regulations, and one of the few smart golfing shirts in his possession, which fastened at the wrists with a button instead of links. He was able, also, to be shaved at times, and his hair was well brushed. But illness and anxiety had left their scars. He was as handsome as ever, but older and thinner. The fit of his suit at the moment would have caused real anguish to his tailor in Savile Row, and his hosier would not have acknowledged the cut of that collar. The back of his neck had shrunk perceptibly, his eyes appeared larger, and his well-shaped hand looked almost transparent. Nor did the hideous gas-burners on this dark December afternoon help him. Their fierce white light intensified his pallor. But in the presence of his "friend" he was able to call to his assistance that coolness and self-possession and charm of manner for which he was famous. Whether in the dead of night they sometimes deserted him it was never stated. The only confidential report ever made was to the effect that while in bed in the infirmary he would occasionally pull the bed-clothes over his head, only to have them removed promptly by his watchers, who were ever on the look-out for suicidal tricks in their captives.

His action, however, might only have been due to misery and mental pain. It was difficult to say,

After he had glanced at the warder behind the glass door, he looked across the table at Adye.

"I hope you're better," said the K.C.

"Oh, yes, thanks. But it would have been kinder of the pneumonia to have finished me. This is a pretty rotten existence."

A bitter smile crossed his face, and there was a tone of recklessness in his voice.

"Now, I don't want to tire you more than I can help," said Adye.

"My dear fellah, if you knew the comfort it is to see you two."

"But I must take you as shortly as I can through the whole story from A to Z."

"But first of all, Adye, let me thank you for doing this for me. It's—it's good of you."

"You must thank your wife for that," was the quiet answer.

Ware looked at Bodsell, who was sitting some distance away.

"Has my wife arranged with you," he asked diffidently, "as to the—fees and all that?"

"Mr. Adye will hear of no fee," replied the solicitor. "This is a matter of friendship."

Ware looked straight into Adye's eyes, and Adye looked straight into his. But nothing more was spoken upon that point. Charles Bodsell was there.

"Now, just follow me," said the K.C. in the tone of a counsel who by cross-examination was searching for the truth. "We'll leave the financial side of the matter for the moment. We'll go straight to that afternoon of September the tenth."

Ware just closed his eyes for an instant and tried, though he was palpably very weak, to sit more upright, as if bracing himself for an ordeal.

"You were present in the library when your brother-in-law went to bathe, and remained in the room for some time after that. For how long?"

"I couldn't say exactly."

"What made you eventually leave the room?"

"My wife said she thought I was leaving Sir Henry Egerton rather a long time on the croquet lawn, or words to that effect. And — and it was true. I had forgotten all about him."

"Was any one with Sir Henry on the croquet lawn?"

"Yes, Marston and his wife — but you know that. You were there."

"You must remember I'm going to defend you. I can't be a witness as well. Just answer the questions. Were they playing croquet?"

"Yes."

"And when Lady Ware suggested your joining Sir Henry Egerton, what did you do?"

"What did I do? Why, I joined them."

"How soon?"

Ware hesitated for a moment thoughtfully.

"Oh, in a few minutes," he answered.

"How long would it take you, going direct, to reach the croquet lawn from the library window?"

"Oh, not long, of course."

"It's so close?"

"Yes."

"How close?"

"Er — about a hundred yards."

"As much as that?"

"Well — er — it might be seventy or eighty."

"Or perhaps only fifty?"

"It's possible. I've never measured it."

"When you stand outside the terrace just outside the library window, is it quite easy to see the croquet lawn?"

"Yes, you can see it. The terrace is at a higher level, and you look rather down at the lawn."

"But the difference in the two levels is not very great, is it? A matter of three shallow steps, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"And any one upon the croquet lawn could equally well see you outside the library window on the terrace?"

"I — I suppose so."

"But Sir Henry Egerton did. He distinctly says so."

"Yes, yes, I forgot for the moment."

"He says, further, that he saw you descend the *other* steps, which are some six in number, opposite the library window, to the lower level of the garden *not* in the direction of the croquet lawn, and that you did not join him and the others for quite a quarter of an hour. Can you explain that?"

"I was extremely worried that day, though he may not have known it. I did go down the steps he speaks of. But I only sat down on a seat for a minute or two before going round to the croquet."

"Can that seat be seen from the croquet lawn?"

"No."

"Might it have been longer than a minute or two?"

"Well — er —"

"Might it have been three minutes?"

"Of course, as I say, I was frightfully worried, and I was trying to think what I could do."

"Might it then have been five minutes?"

"Oh, perhaps it might. I can't say really."

"Might it have been ten?"

"Well — er —"

"Might it have been fifteen?"

"No, it couldn't have been." And Ware wiped his upper lip with his handkerchief, while the K.C. paused before putting the next question.

"I may take it, I suppose, that when your wife suggested your going to Sir Henry Egerton, you had it in your mind to follow the suggestion?"

"Yes," answered Ware wearily.

"Then why didn't you take the nearest way? Why go out of the direction altogether?"

Ware shrugged his shoulders helplessly and answered:

"I could no more give reasons for my movements that day than I could fly."

Adye's piercing eyes were fixed upon him with an un-

usual intentness, and became to Ware, as many a person described who had been cross-examined by him, like one.

"You say the seat you sat upon cannot be seen from the croquet lawn?"

"That is so."

"About what level upon the six odd steps would you reach, do you think, before you would be out of sight of the croquet lawn?"

"Oh, the bottom perhaps."

"Then from that moment Sir Henry Egerton or any one else upon the croquet lawn would lose sight of you?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Aren't you sure?"

"Well, yes, I suppose I am sure of that."

"How long would it take you to walk quickly from that spot to the bathing-shed?"

The question came out with great rapidity, but Ware replied quite naturally:

"Oh, very little time. It's nothing of a distance; certainly not more than a hundred yards."

"That's a very frank answer. I shall put that question to you when you go into the box, and I would suggest your answering it in the same way. You say emphatically, then, that you remained on that seat for less than fifteen minutes."

"I do."

"And that Sir Henry Egerton is speaking an untruth when he puts it at a quarter of an hour from the time he saw you come out of the library to the terrace to the time of your arrival on the lawn?"

"I say that Sir Henry is mistaken — seriously mistaken."

"Well, then, you joined him. What followed?"

"Very shortly afterwards we all came back to the library to my wife, and a few minutes later Rate called me out into the hall to tell me the awful discovery. Must I go into all the rest?"

"No, Ware. You needn't do that. I'll take you to another side of the matter." And Adye considered a while

the form in which he could approach it, while Ware again wiped his upper lip with his handkerchief.

"You're feeling well enough for me to go on? I'll delay it till another time if you wish."

"Oh, no. I'm all right." And he smiled pathetically at his cross-examiner.

"Well, then, this volume of 'French Crimes' and the Book-diary. You'd been in the habit of reading that sort of thing?"

"Oh, for a long time. It was a hobby of mine."

"And you made it a practice to enter the crimes you read in the book-diary?"

"And other books too."

"I agree. Can you account at all for the remarkable coincidence that you read 'The Farm Pond Murder' the day before your brother-in-law's death?"

"How can I account for it? It is simply, as you say, a remarkable coincidence. There was no secret about it. Why, on that very day I had told Sir Henry Egerton of my hobby in my wife's presence. I even told him I'd been reading a French murder."

"Did you tell him what kind of murder it was?"

"No. He merely laughed and didn't ask me. If he had, I daresay I should told him."

"Where do you generally keep that book-diary?"

"Generally on my writing-table."

"Was it there upon that day?"

"Yes, so far as I remember. Yes. I'm sure it was."

"Used it to lie on the top of the table so that any one might take it up and look at it?"

"Oh, yes."

"Can you account for it being found on the bottom shelf of one of the bookcases, out of sight — some way back?"

"No, I can't."

"Did you put it there?"

"No."

"You're definite upon that point?"

"Quite definite."

"What makes you so definite?"

"I'll explain. Our departure from Wilbury after the inquest was hurried. We were all anxious to get away. I knew I'd left the book-diary on the writing-table, and just shortly before I left I went into the library to look for it."

"Why?"

"I wanted to pack it and take it to town."

"But what for?"

"I nearly always had it by me to enter any fresh books in it that I might read."

"Well?"

"I couldn't find it. My writing-table had been removed from the middle of the room to the side wall when — when poor Eustace was placed there. I can only imagine that probably in the turmoil the diary fell on the floor from the table, and that one of the servants or somebody, seeing it lying there, placed it on the first shelf that was handy. That chanced to be the one on the bottom row where the atlas was."

"Did you mention its disappearance to any one?"

"No."

"Nor inquire if it had been seen anywhere?"

"No. I—I only thought of it at the last moment, and then, as I say, I longed to get away from the place."

"Were you anxious at all about its disappearance?"

"Anxious?" And Ware regarded the K.C. inquiringly.

"Annoyed or put out over it?"

"Not unduly so. I—I don't think I gave it another thought."

The K.C. remained in deep contemplation for some time.

"Now, as to the signet-ring which they found in the lake," continued Adye, "were you wearing that identical ring on that day?"

"I was."

"You're certain of that?"

"Positive; I lent it to Marston that very afternoon to seal my letter to Germany about Eustace."

The answer was as rapidly given as the question.

"Were you wearing that ring upon the evening *after* the tragedy?"

"I was."

"Can you account satisfactorily for its subsequent discovery in the lake?"

"I can."

Adye regarded him with quick anxiety. His expression was eloquent. It showed Ware distinctly that his answer upon this point was one of the utmost importance.

"How do you account for it?" he asked slowly.

There was a moment's silence before Ware began his explanation.

"Three days after the catastrophe — early in the morning — I went down to the lake to bathe."

"From the same spot?" And the K.C.'s eyes opened wide with astonishment.

"Yes, from one of the boats. And —"

"Wait one moment."

Adye wished to collect his thoughts, so amazed was he. No one spoke for some time, and Bodsell alone moved. He made a note of this explanation upon a piece of paper near him. Adye did not express his thoughts as he sat silently watching his client in front of him sitting quite composedly with his arms folded. But he was contemplating him in the light of the most remarkable study he had ever encountered in his experience. Here was a man actually able to bathe in the very place where three days before his brother-in-law was drowned! Adye thought that he had never heard anything so astounding. Magdalen was, in truth, right when she described Ware to him as abnormal.

"Yes — go on," said Adye very quietly.

"I lost the ring then. It was on getting back into the boat after my swim that it slipped off. It was always a shade large for me."

"Er — did you miss it at once?"

"Almost."

"Had you always been in the habit of wearing it?"

"Oh, for some years."

"On which hand?"

"The right."

"Finger?"

"The little finger."

"Did you mention the loss to any one at the time?"

Ware thought for a while, and replied:

"I don't think I did."

"That was a pity. Are you sure you mentioned it to no one?"

"No, I don't think I did."

"On the night of your arrest at Bruton Street you were taken to the police station and searched. And you were found to be wearing then a signet ring almost identical with the one you lost, upon the little finger of the right hand."

"That is so," was the calm reply.

"For how long had you had that in your possession?"

"Oh, a few weeks."

"Was it a present, or did you buy it?"

"I bought it."

"Where?"

"At Felkington's in Cockspur Street."

"Was it made for you, or did you find it in the shop?"

"Found it in the shop. It was just an ordinary plain gold signet-ring, with an oval seal."

"When did you buy it?"

"I forget the date, but Felkington's could give that."

"And they, of course, engraved your monogram upon it — 'H.W.' Is the design of the monogram the same as that on the ring you lost?"

"Oh, exactly. They have my pattern at Felkington's."

"Was it shortly after your return to London from Wilbury that you bought it?"

"Yes. I'm not at all sure it wasn't the next day. But Felkington's could tell you, no doubt."

"Why did you buy it?" And the K.C. eyed him fixedly.

"Why did I buy it? Well, I missed my ring. I often wanted to seal my letters, and —"

"You ordered it to the exact pattern of the other?"

"Certainly. I liked the pattern."

"On this morning, three days after the tragedy — that you bathed — did anyone in the house know that you bathed?"

"I don't think so. I got up very early. It was one of those terribly hot mornings in September, and I was restless."

"About what time did you get up?"

"At six."

"Early as that?"

"Yes, quite."

"Before any servants were down?"

"Yes, they're not over good at getting up, I'm afraid."

"How soon were you back?"

"Oh, in a quarter of an hour, I dare say."

"Later, when the servants were about, did you give your bathing-suit to any one to have it dried, or leave it out in your room or anywhere else for that purpose?"

"No, I wore no bathing-suit. It was so early. No one was about."

"Your wife didn't know you went to bathe?"

"No. We had separate rooms—some distance apart."

"At breakfast, after breakfast, or at any time during the day did you mention the fact of your having bathed to any one who could corroborate your story?"

"I don't think I did, worse luck! We were all so upset over the inquest that we thought and talked of nothing else. I think the bathe and the ring went clean out of my mind."

Ware was undoubtedly now feeling the strain of this cross-examination. He had stood it, considering his weak state, remarkably well, and some sort of outburst from him was not surprising.

"Oh, but Adye," he cried, "I know what you're thinking—!"

"Calm yourself, Ware. Calm yourself. I'm only thinking of one thing—the effect of everything upon a court and jury," said Adye slowly.

"Everything's as ugly as it could possibly be. I know that perfectly well. As I said at the police court, it's a web of circumstances they've got round me. If I'd only done some of the things I see you wish I had done! It's fate, this!"

He sprang to his feet as he uttered these words. For

the first time he lost his self-control. Adye very gently induced him to resume his seat, but the man's excessive weakness was plain to him. Beads of sweat stood out upon his pale forehead, and almost as fast as Ware wiped them away with his handkerchief they returned. The warder outside the glass panel kept his eyes riveted upon him. He was ready to spring into the room at any moment if needed.

In the circumstances, therefore, Adye resolved to conclude the interview as quickly as possible.

"But now," he said quietly, "I have some information to give you of an extraordinary character. An ex-bookmaker, called Tommy Bold, at your wish apparently, was strolling in the grounds that afternoon."

And Adye, as quickly as he could, gave Bold's story, which Ware listened to silently with his eyes fixed upon the K.C. He did not move a muscle, and at its conclusion seemed to fail to grasp its import.

"You realize the weight this may carry, don't you?" asked Adye. "The man's history is not a good one, of course, but the early portion of his evidence will be corroborated by Marston Gurney."

"Adye," said Ware in a whisper as he closed his eyes, "this — this is the first bit of luck I've had. If — if either of you — see — Tommy Bold — in the meantime — will you — thank him for me?"

"I'll do so certainly," said Bodsell.

"And now," interrupted Adye, "I think I've done," and he stood up. "There's only one thing more. Over the money side of the affair, when you give your evidence you must be absolutely frank and hide nothing."

"Oh! yes," murmured Ware. "It's no use hiding anything. It's all out."

"I shan't spare you, remember, in that respect. You see, you can't get away from the letter of that woman, Mrs. Scale, to you. She lends you £2000, and when she thinks you're tired of her, she demands it back."

"Yes, it was mad of me to keep that letter. I didn't know I had. It — it was mad of me." And Ware rose from his chair.

"You understand then," Adye went on as he moved a little towards the door, "that over your inevitable bankruptcy at that time no excuse can be made. I don't wish to be unnecessarily harsh, Ware, but it would be absurd to try to palliate it. Your treatment of your wife was — well, the whole of that side of the story is as unsavoury as anything could be."

Ware lowered his eyes.

"Good-bye," he said huskily, "and — and thank you for all your — goodness."

"Your gratitude is due to your wife." And Adye looked away.

Bodsell's bearing was different; he did not know so much. He expressed the hope that the suffering man might soon be stronger, while Adye opened the door.

The warder promptly beckoned to his prisoner, and Ware slowly passed out into the grim corridor, where he was handed over to the close guardianship of another officer, who accompanied him back to the prison infirmary. For a moment or two Adye stood still, and watched the slowly retreating figure. He had seen many a man in a like position but never one of the same status and education. It was an awful sight. He came to the conclusion that Ware was paying heavily.

"Of course he's very weak, sir," said the warder cheerfully, as he escorted the two lawyers to the main gate, "but like all prisoners of his class, he's as good as possible — gives no trouble at all, sir. There's a good deal in caste, sir. They'll soon get him stronger in the infirmary. They'll feed him up well, that's what they'll do, sir. He's got over a fortnight yet before the trial."

Chains and keys again, warders saluted ceremoniously, and the two silent men sat back once more in their taxi-cab.

Adye was loath to talk. He tried to sleep. He wanted to dream of Devonshire again. But he could not.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE fortnight had passed. After the Recorder's charge to the Grand Jury at the Old Bailey a True Bill was found against Hubert Ware, and nothing now remained to him but to take his trial for murder.

The warder's remarks to Michael Adye were correct. Great care had been taken of the prize prisoner in the infirmary. They had "fattened him up" splendidly! Under no conditions, whatever the issue of the trial — particularly if he was to be condemned — was he to be allowed to die a natural death if they could help it. Equally watchful were they lest any attempt upon his own life should be made. He showed, however, no inclination in that direction, but they diligently watched his every movement day and night. To him they gave his health as the reason for his continued sojourn in the infirmary, but they did not credit him with superior acumen. They did not realize his exceptional knowledge in such matters, and it frankly appealed to his sense of humour as he gained somewhat in strength. It tickled him to see their faces when he calmly informed his warders that he, with his interest in all these things, had been over several prisons and knew exactly why they were keeping him there. Now and again at night, after a day of deep depression, a fit of wilfulness would seize him, and he would deliberately pop his head under the bed-clothes with the sole object of making his watchers remove them. And then he would look up mischievously in the dim light and laugh at them.

They made, however, no serious complaint of this, because Ware did it all in such a charming way. To the end he captivated everybody. But some of the officers began to think him "a bit dotty."

He was distinctly stronger than when Adye last saw him in the prison, but he was not the same man as before his

arrest. The pneumonia had naturally taxed his strength, but the mental strain had, perhaps, shattered him more. He was amenable to everything, and responded as well as he could to the "fattening-up" process, but to say that he ate well would be an exaggeration. One sensational paper stated that he did, but, then, some of us have read of those "hearty breakfasts" partaken of by men on the morning of their execution.

And now the hour had come for him to face his trial. He must put a terrific effort upon himself, and summon all the nerve-power that remained to him.

His wife had returned from Devonshire the day before, greatly improved by the quiet restfulness of the place, and prepared to sit regularly in that terrible court to support him with every ounce of strength in her body. She was greatly cheered by the statement of Tommy Bold, whose coming evidence was kept a profound secret and was expected to create an enormous surprise and sensation.

Here is an instance of one of the great advantages the English law gives to accused persons. Whereas the Prosecution are bound to disclose beforehand to the Defence all the evidence they intend to produce against the prisoner, the Defence need disclose to the Prosecution no part of their case at all. And the Attorney-General had no more notion now of the existence of such a witness as Tommy Bold than that Adye had just had that surprising interview with him before the two famous counsel met in the dining-room of their club.

On the opening day of the great trial, and on the following days, the court at the Old Bailey and its precincts presented an amazing spectacle. It had been announced that Mr. Justice Petworth would sit at 10.30. But for over an hour previously the building was besieged. Crowds of all classes thronged Newgate Street, and many motor omnibuses were held up at the corner. Their top seats were packed with men going citywards, and all of them stood up to watch the seething mass below, and the efforts of the large number of City police to control and regulate the multitude.

"Pass along there, please — pass along," the great voices shouted out interminably.

There was a crush, of course, of the rough element, but there were many hundreds of respectably attired middle-class people, who, apparently, are so opulent as to be able to spend hours a day at trials or cricket matches alike. A constant stream of taxi-cabs flowed sluggishly through the congested streets from two directions, one from the Holborn end, the other from Ludgate Circus, conveying smartly dressed people of society of both sexes, who with the hundreds of others who had failed to get in, had exhausted the officials in the fight for tickets. There were some peers and peeresses, several baronets, a fair sprinkling of knights and their ladies, novelists, dramatists, and parsons, and, as usual on these occasions, numerous actors and actresses who, if they occasionally admit "dead heads" to their theatres, did not see, perhaps, why the compliment should not be returned.

All had been warned to arrive early. Particularly early breakfasts had accordingly been taken, which in some cases must have been particularly inconvenient, possibly to the theatrical contingent, which, they say, breakfasts late. But what did it matter really when the occasion was considered? They were all going to hear the most sensational trial of modern times, a memorable experience! They were going to see Sir Hubert Ware in the dock and under the fire of cross-examination! They were to hear him fight for his life, and scrutinize his every movement and every look when the evidence was being given! They were to see his wife go into the witness-box — at least, they hoped they would not be done out of that! They would be able to watch her demeanour while she sat in court, unless by some ill-fortune her back was turned to them! They were going to hear all the revelations about Ware's life, which had been a big surprise to many people! They would see for themselves how he and his wife bore it! And they secretly yearned for a collapse! That would give them a thrill! They would be able to stare at Mr. Justice Petworth, one of the ablest judges on the bench! They wondered which way he would

lean! Their bets upon the result would depend so much upon that. They looked forward to a deadly speech by the Attorney-General, and a tremendous effort by "M.A."! Both sexes were alike, the well-dressed men and the beautifully gowned women. All classes were levelled up, the peer with the clerk, the peeress with the typist. There was nothing to choose between them. Every soul was there with the same object; they had but the one great laudable ambition—to look on at the torture of a fellow-being!

In most cases the fortunate ones in their taxi-cabs deemed it wise to alight and walk the last fifty yards to the doors. They elbowed their way through the crowd by the aid of the police, to whom they showed their tickets, and many a snapshot was taken of this celebrity and that. They formed an extraordinary *queue*, these well-groomed folk, with the look of strained anxiety on their faces, lest they might be late for the rising of the curtain. And about the women there was an interesting incongruity—beautiful furs upon their backs, enormous hats upon their heads, and little packets of sandwiches in their hands to eat in court at the luncheon adjournment to avoid all risk of losing their places and missing a single word.

It was a wonderful picnic!

But there was another side to the shield. At an earlier moment of the morning a clear space was kept for the two horses which clattered down the street with "Black Maria" behind them and Sir Hubert Ware inside, but hidden from the world. The movements of the mob could be controlled, but not their voices, and as the great, grim, brown vehicle swept through the gates which were open to receive it, a big shout went up from the large sporting element assembled: "Three cheers for Hubby Ware!" they cried with all their might. "Hurrah! Hurrah!"

"He never failed to help a pal," yelled one.

"And always paid his bets," roared another. "Good luck to him!"

"Hurrah!" they shouted again. "Hurrah!"

And the big gates swung to.

The noise filled the streets. And to those within the

courts it conveyed the sympathies of those without. Ware must have felt grateful for that greeting. He could not have failed to hear it. It was a twofold message to him — there were those who believed in his innocence, and it was the signal to him of his arrival after his long and terrible windowless drive from his prison to the place of his trial.

Then there was the judge, who, sitting well back in his closed motor car, escaped observation at his particular entrance to the great stone building. His feelings were widely different from those of the sight-seers who were rushing to their places. An unaffected sense of the huge responsibility lay upon him. It is one of the heaviest loads imaginable. The power of the man in the red robe is enormous. He has to see that justice is done, and it may be fairly asserted that few members of the public have any conception of the vigilance he must exercise, or of the strain imposed upon him by a trial which is a question of life or death. One ill-considered word from him can sway a jury. One omission on his part of an important point in a prisoner's favour may send him to his doom. He is the instrument of the law; and he is there to administer it firmly and impartially, to protect the prisoner from unfairness, to guard his welfare jealously, and to exemplify that fine *dictum* of British justice — that a man is innocent until he is proved to be guilty.

An English judge's position is a great one indeed.

Mr. Justice Petworth was escorted to his private room to robe, and on his way through the passage ceremonious to a degree were the salutes from the police and court attendants, and low were the bows of barristers in their wigs and gowns.

Within the court itself the clock pointed to 10.20.

Expectation was upon the faces of all. The seats reserved for the Bar were crowded. The gallery was packed to suffocation. Places in the body of the court below, those labelled "City-Lands" and others, were thronged with well-dressed men and women whom we saw arrive, some of the privileged being tucked away in a corner of the long Bench, where abreast of the judge sit the Lord Mayor,

Aldermen of the City of London in their fur-trimmed gowns, and the Under-Sheriffs with their neat black suits and swords. The "well" was occupied by the solicitors and detectives engaged in the trial. Their bags and documents covered the table. They talked in groups together. And immediately above it there were the long desk and seats, the only ones unoccupied at present, which shortly would be filled by the counsel retained in the case. But there was one other portion of the court upon which all the excited eyes were centred: that was the enormous wooden dock. There it stood facing the judge's chair and waiting for the man who was to be tried for his life. It looked strangely empty now, weirdly so; but in a few minutes it would be transformed, and all the anxious gazers would be satisfied.

Ten twenty-five and the buzz of conversation increased. Many of the people were standing up. Friends waved to friends, acquaintances nodded to acquaintances, and the look upon the faces was one of keen enjoyment! The Clerk of the Court then took his place beneath the Bench, and a nervous hush fell upon the building when the Attorney-General and Michael Adye were seen threading their way in front of their juniors through the crowded gangway.

All eyes were turned upon them as they took their seats quietly and unostentatiously. Again the voices swelled. All was in readiness. The great leaders talked quietly with their juniors, and slowly untied their massive briefs in front of them, and the clock said 10.29. The excitement was intense. Only one more minute to wait. Till then still the empty dock, still the empty bench. It was the longest minute of all. Then suddenly with a jerk there came through the buzz of voices a "Rat, tat, tat" upon a doorway, and the stentorian command of "Silence! silence!" from the usher. Every being in the court stood up. Every soul was as quiet as death. And Mr. Justice Petworth, the personification of dignity and strength in his red robe, walked slowly to the Bench, bowed low to the Bar, and took his seat. Not a whisper could be heard, and above the silence there came the sudden sound of several footsteps.

The next instant Sir Hubert Ware stepped forward firmly to the front of the dock surrounded by his bodyguard of warders. It was an awful moment. Every eye in the court was riveted upon him. All heads were craned forward to scan his face and to watch him standing in front of his judge, at whom alone he stared. He was looking pale and drawn, but there was a great calm and courage upon the man, and considerable dignity in the way in which he ignored the presence of the vast audience. Out came the pencils of the draughtsmen, and concealed cameras did their work in deadly fear of discovery.

The Clerk of the Court then read from the indictment that Hubert Ware stood charged with wilful murder. At its conclusion he asked him:

"Are you guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty," was the quiet, determined answer which had almost a note of defiance in its tone; and a subdued murmur of conversation arose. The tedious routine of swearing the jury was then followed, and finally the box was filled by the "twelve good men and true."

Ware removed his overcoat, which he placed over the back of his chair, and, at a sign from one of his warders, sat down with his arms folded.

But he had so engrossed the attention of all present that one other tragic figure had escaped observation. That was his wife, who, closely veiled and in company with Celia, was conducted quietly by Charles Bodsell to a seat in the well of the court just beneath Michael Adye.

She was there, cost her what it might, to face the ordeal to the end.

Then amid a hush of silence the Attorney-General gravely rose to open the case for the Crown.

The great drama had begun, and the sight-seers, male and female alike, settled themselves down for their great treat.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE Attorney-General spoke at length and unfolded to the jury in his deadly fashion the extraordinary story.

The witnesses in turn, as at the police court, gave their evidence in support of it, and the process every day for some days was continued, the public excitement over the trial increasing with every sitting and the clamour for seats each morning being greater than ever.

There was no doubt that the discoveries of Inspector Watkin caused the biggest sensation, and upon the day that he described them he visibly swelled with importance. On coming out of court at the adjournment he heard himself described as a "smart chap," and he was delighted.

The finding of the ring, and the fact of Ware wearing an almost identical one upon the night of his arrest, evidently made a great impression upon the judge and jury, and the evidence regarding it was followed closely. The prosecution called an assistant from Felkington's, who proved from his books that the prisoner had bought it upon the day after his return to London from Wilbury. When the witness made that statement, the Attorney-General paused with great effect and there was a stir in court. It was a very difficult fact to get over, and Michael Adye's handling of it was interesting to watch. He rose at once and said that Ware in no way disputed that part of the case, and that he had only a few questions to put to the witness:

"Sir Hubert Ware, you say, gave you directions to engrave the monogram upon the ring. Had you, as a fact, a seal bearing the monogram design which he always used?"

"We had."

"And was that the design used upon the new ring?"

"Yes."

"Did he go into elaborate details as to how the monogram was to be engraved?"

"Oh, no, not at all. He merely said that he wanted his ordinary design, which we had."

"There is nothing remarkable about the pattern of these rings, is there?" And he held up the two in either hand, while every head in the court leaned forward.

"No."

"As a matter of fact they are not absolutely identical, are they?"

"Not quite."

"I thought so," said Adye with great satisfaction, as he leaned against the desk behind him. "You're giving your evidence very fairly, if I may say so, and I want you, please, to tell my lord and the jury how these two rings differ. Just take them in your hand."

The rings were passed up to the witness, who proceeded to examine them. He was in the act of placing his jeweller's glass in his eye to do so when Adye stopped him quickly.

"No, no, without the glass," he said. "Isn't it plain to the naked eye that the two rings are different?"

The witness paused for a moment while he looked at the rings, holding them side by side.

"Yes, they are different to some extent."

"Ah, I thought so," came confidentially from Adye.

"The new one at the sides is more chased than the other."

"Exactly! So that it would be erroneous to describe them as identical?"

The Attorney-General turned quickly to his opponent and said:

"Almost identical was the expression used, Mr. Adye."

"Almost identical, then, with a marked difference! I accept my learned friend's correction. Almost identical with a marked difference. Isn't that so?"

"There is a difference, sir."

"Come, come," said Adye forcibly, "isn't there a *marked* difference?"

The witness hesitated. "Wouldn't you yourself describe it as a marked difference?"

The court waited a second for the answer, and the witness lifted his eyes hurriedly towards the dock, where he caught the earnest gaze of Sir Hubert Ware.

"Yes," he answered, again examining the rings, "I should say myself there's a marked difference."

"I'm obliged to you," said Adye, who, with a big sweep of his gown, resumed his seat with his eyes fixed upon the jury.

"You say that you would say *yourself* there's a marked difference," came quietly from the Attorney-General, who rose to re-examine the witness. "Do you mean by that that others might not agree with you?"

"No, sir, I don't mean that."

"What do you mean, then?"

"I mean that, speaking for myself, I should notice the difference."

"As an expert?"

"I think, Mr. Attorney," interrupted the judge courteously, "that it would be better at this stage for the jury to examine for themselves the two rings. It is entirely a question for them."

The witness passed the rings to the jury, close by him, and some time passed while they handled them with great interest and care.

The evidence, too, of Sir Henry Egerton was listened to with keen attention, and it was an engrossing moment when his friend Michael Adye cross-examined him. It was patent to everybody that the trial was causing Egerton much pain. His personal friendship with the Wares placed him, indeed, in a terrible position, and he gave all his answers in a subdued voice.

"Sir Henry," said Adye, "when Sir Hubert Ware mentioned the fact to you that he entered all the crimes he read in his 'book-diary' as he read them, may I take it that you were amused?"

"I was. I thought it an extraordinary hobby."

"You say he told you he had been reading a remarkable French murder."

"Yes, his expression was a 'a fascinating one,' I think."

"He didn't tell you the name of the story?"

"No."

"Why was that, do you imagine?"

"I didn't ask what it was called."

"Exactly. But if you had asked, you have no doubt, have you, that he would have answered you frankly?"

"None at all."

"What was his mood at the time?"

"He was in excellent spirits, and in a chaffing mood. I remember he said, speaking of France, that they did their murders over there so picturesquely."

There was considerable laughter in court at this answer. Even Mr. Justice Petworth smiled, and placed his hand over his mouth. And all eyes looked at Ware, whose countenance also lighted up for the moment.

"And you had been playing tennis with the prisoner, had you not?"

"I had."

"Was he in his ordinary good spirits then?"

"Yes, excellent."

"And may I take it from you, Sir Henry, that, if asked at the time, you would have asserted boldly that the last thing he had in his mind upon that day was the contemplation of murder?"

"You may indeed. I could not have believed it possible."

"Was he on friendly terms with his young brother-in-law?"

"Very, I should say."

"He always appeared to be kindly disposed towards him?"

"Always when I saw them together."

"And what was his demeanour when he announced the tragedy to those present?"

"It was one of great distress and emotion."

"Would it be a fair description to give of him that he appeared almost stunned by the news?"

"I think it would."

"There was no hesitation on his part to go down to the bathing-shed with you?"

"None whatever."

"And you would say, would you not, that his entire attitude subsequently was consistent with his absolute innocence?"

"Quite."

Here Adye leaned forward with both hands resting on the table while he lowered his voice to a solemn whisper: "Wouldn't you say, Sir Henry, after your long experience, that it was overwhelmingly inconsistent with his guilt?"

"I think I should."

The K.C. hitched up his gown and waited for the answer to sink into the jury's minds. He scrutinized their faces closely. There broke forth hushed voices throughout the court. A great impression had been made in favour of the prisoner. And he alone appeared unmoved. His face was unreadable.

"And now, Sir Henry," continued Adye, "I want you, if you will, to fix your mind upon that moment when you were playing croquet. I know you will be scrupulously fair and very careful how you answer me. I'm taking you now to the approximate time when that poor young man met his death. I understood you to say that you saw Sir Hubert Ware come out from the library on to the terrace?"

"Well, to be strictly accurate, I was unable from where I was standing to see him actually step out on to the terrace."

"I understand. But you were able to see him a yard and a half, say, from the window?"

"Yes."

"And you saw him descend the flight of stone steps opposite that window to a lower level of the garden when he disappeared?"

"I did."

"Are you quite sure, when you say that a quarter of an hour passed before he joined you and the Gurneys on the croquet lawn, that it was as much?"

"I think it was," replied Egerton gravely.

"But are you sure?"

"Yes, I am sure."

"Are you prepared to swear that it was as much?"

"I am."

"Why? You gave an answer to my learned friend the Attorney-General in that regard, but I didn't quite follow it."

"When I first saw Sir Hubert Ware outside the window I had just missed a shot, and a church clock chimed the quarter. I looked at my watch to see if it was right, as I had to go to London by train later, and when Sir Hubert Ware joined us on the croquet lawn I remarked that I hadn't had an innings for a quarter of an hour. I had just looked at my watch again."

"And if Sir Hubert Ware says that at the most it was a matter of ten minutes, he is not speaking the truth?"

"He is inaccurate."

"Tell me; near the flight of steps you saw him descend, is there a seat?"

"There is."

"Assuming that Sir Hubert Ware did, as the prosecution submit, go straight from those steps and murder his brother-in-law, and then join you on the croquet lawn, and that he only took a quarter of an hour to do so—that would be a very short space of time, would it not, for an appalling deed of that nature?"

"It would."

"I agree with you that it would be possible, but it would be very short, I submit."

"Yes."

"And when he joined you, did he come from the direction where you had seen him disappear to the lower level?"

"Yes, I think he did."

"How was his demeanour?"

"Quite calm."

"No indication of excitement about him?"

"None whatever."

"Was he smoking a cigarette?"

"Yes! I think he was."

"Was he wearing the same clothes you'd seen him in just before?"

"Yes."

"Did they appear disturbed, or wet, or dirty at all?"

"No."

"Sir Henry, did he strike you in *any* way at that moment as a man who might just before not only have committed a crime, but the crime of murder?"

"In no way."

Thus with each witness did the trial swing this way and then the other. It was a bewildering story to those who heard it.

On some days many listeners thought that Ware was sure of an acquittal, on others that he would be convicted.

The evidence as to his financial condition at the time of the murder was prejudicial to him, but Michael Adye showed the judge and jury that he would in no way dispute that.

When the woman, Mrs. Scale, attended on *subpœna*, and revealed that unpleasant side of the case, she was not cross-examined by Adye. Nor were other numerous creditors of an ordinary kind, except as to one particular — that the communications which they had subsequently received from Messrs. Bragson and Bragson expressly stated that it was Lady Ware who was going to satisfy them.

Paterson was also adroitly questioned by Adye, who, seeing the gardener's uncertainty as to how the man in the punt was dressed, and with Tommy Bold's story in his mind, elicited from him that it might have been a white Trilby hat that he was wearing.

At that moment any one near would have noticed a curious inquiring look on the Attorney-General's face as he regarded Adye quickly. What had Michael Adye got up his sleeve? He would give much to know.

He looked equally puzzled, too, when Adye asked Dr. Winter this question:

"You say that the small contusion and abrasion on the forehead *could* have been caused by a hand wearing that ring. Could it equally well have been caused, since it was an *ante-mortem* wound, by the boy falling forward and striking his forehead against something hard, no matter what?"

"Oh, yes, quite well."

"The wound, doctor, is consistent with both theories?"

"Certainly."

Adye sat down upon that. And keener and keener did

speculation become as to what the defence was to be. The crowd in the court had already heard Adye ask the doctor whether by any possibility the finger marks upon the throat could have been self-inflicted, to which the police surgeon had replied that it was exceedingly improbable, though in the case of a man mad with desperation it might just be possible for such marks to be made by himself. And they had noticed also the judge's scepticism upon this point when he questioned the witness himself.

"I want you to do yourself justice, Dr. Winter," he said. "Remembering the bruises on the throat which you have described as being caused, in your opinion, by considerable force and pressure by the hand — do you seriously mean us to understand that they might by any possibility have been produced by the boy's own fingers?"

"It is more than improbable, my lord."

The judge raised his eyebrows.

"That's as far as you will go, is it?" he said quietly. "Very well."

The rest of the evidence which had been given at the inquest and the police court was, of course, taken, and minutely cross-examined to by Michael Adye, and the three days which it had occupied had been a severe strain to all concerned.

Excitement as to what answer Ware was going to make to the strange circumstantial story was enormous, and when the hour came for his brilliant advocate to rise in his place to give it, the stillness in the court was painful. Every one expected one of the finest speeches ever heard at the Bar. He was a tremendous fighter at all times, but he was never in his life so extended as now.

He stood up slowly at the table, and in his wig and gown he was a magnificent figure of a manly man. His face was pale and grave, but there was a fearless confidence about his bearing which, to those who knew him well, was even more marked than usual. Was it because a moment before the beautiful eyes of the woman he loved gazed up into his with a silent appealing look which he alone in all the world could understand? It may have been.

"May it please your lordship. Gentlemen of the jury,"

he began in a low key, "in a case of such importance as this I am going to take an unusual course."

He paused, and even the tick of the court clock could be heard.

"I am not going to weary you with any speech at this stage, because I don't think it is necessary. You have heard the evidence for the prosecution, and the answer to that, and the overwhelming answer, shall be the evidence for the defence."

He then with a big, bold movement swept round upon his heel, and pointed to Sir Hubert Ware, the two men staring into each other's eyes.

"I will call the man at the bar, gentlemen," and his voice shook with emotion, "to tell you his own story fearlessly. And I will call his wife," he whispered before raising it again like a clarion.

"But, in addition to that, I am going to call before you entirely *independent* evidence which I submit respectfully to you will not only cause this prosecution to fail, but establish the prisoner's innocence beyond all possibility of doubt.—I call the prisoner."

He then sat down, and the surprise created by his few words was very great. What was the independent evidence to be? Would it carry the weight which Adye was so confident in assuming? Whatever it was, how would it fare under the cross-examination of the Attorney-General? Would it be strong enough to influence the judge? Could it convince the jury?

With these questions in the minds of all, the attention of everybody was fixed upon the dock. Its door was opened and Ware stepped out into the court, closely followed by a warder, and walked firmly into the witness-box. He took the oath without parade of any kind, though he uttered its words with sincerity, and then Michael Adye stood up once more and addressed the judge.

"Might the prisoner be seated, my lord?" he asked. "He's been very ill in prison, and —"

"Certainly," replied Mr. Justice Petworth.

But Ware was quick to speak.

"Thank you, my lord," he said, his refined voice being strangely out of keeping with his awful position, "but I would prefer to stand at present."

The reporters had their pencils ready, the judge took up his pen, and the sight-seers waited breathlessly. All looked upon the handsome well-groomed man for his story upon which his life would hang.

"Hubert Ware," rang out the voice of Adye, as the introduction to his first question, "did you kill your brother-in-law, Eustace Ede?"

CHAPTER XXIX

THE effect was electrical. The faces of most people changed colour. The answer, too, and the manner in which it was given, made a deep impression. Ware straightened himself visibly with a big effort, and flung his head back as he looked at his counsel.

"No," he replied with a tremendous emphasis.

Adye then dealt with the financial aspects of the case, and asked him whether the evidence given for the prosecution in that regard was correct.

"Quite correct."

"And Mrs. Scale's story — you don't dispute that?"

"No, I don't dispute it. I wish I could dispute it. There is much in my life that I wish I hadn't done."

"And your liabilities at the time of your brother-in-law's death were as great as described here?"

"They were."

"Tell me now, did you in fact suggest to your wife at any time after the tragedy that she might make arrangements for the future settlement of your debts?"

"I did not."

"In no way whatever did you suggest it?"

"No."

"Had you any hope at all that she might settle them?"

"I had not. The thought never crossed my mind. I should like to add that my wife and I — were not very happy together, through my fault, not hers." And his voice fell at the last words.

"Had you *any* idea when your brother-in-law died to what extent his death would affect you personally?"

"None whatever. The first intimation I had of — of — of my wife's — generous intention was in a letter from her solicitors."

"She might have declined to assist you at all?"

"And she would have been justified. I'm prepared to say in open court that I treated my wife abominably. She deserved every consideration from me, and I gave her none."

Ware gave this outburst with great strength, and its candour impressed everybody. It certainly provided the London papers with exceptional "copy."

Steadily by degrees his skilful counsel led him through the whole tragic story, and he gave his answers without flinching. The prisoner's letter to Germany was produced and read out to the jury, the judge carefully examining the original and its envelope, which bore the correct date, and making a careful note in his book of this important piece of evidence.

"Listen to me," said Adye sharply. "The learned Attorney-General in opening this case described the crime with which you stand charged as a cold-blooded, cruel, and calculated one for money. Did you, as a fact, upon the very day of your brother-in-law's death write that letter to the German family out of solicitude for his welfare?"

"I did."

"And was your brother-in-law to start for Hanover in accordance with that letter on the following Monday?"

"He was."

"Did you ever during his life bear that boy any ill-will?"

"Never."

"Were you fond of him?"

"No, I can't say that I was."

"What's that?" asked the judge quickly. "Did I understand you to say you were *not* fond of him?"

"Yes, my lord. It would be affectation for me to say that I was. He was not a likeable boy. I was always quite friendly with him, but beyond that—" And he left the sentence unfinished with an eloquent shrug of his shoulders.

This was one of the instances of Michael Adye's skill. He was determined to bring out this fact in his "examination in chief." He was not going to leave it to the Attorney-General to elicit in cross-examination, or run the risk of his not raising the point at all. The answer had a remarkable frankness about it when given in this way. Michael Adye knew that. He knew equally shrewdly what would tell with a jury.

Gradually all the points in Ware's case were unfolded, and he gave his account without faltering. His love of criminology was handled by Adye in the lightest possible fashion, and his face as he put his question in that respect was lit up by a good-humoured smile.

"You seem to have been *steeped* in crime, Sir Hubert?" he said. And there was loud laughter in the court.

"But possibly after this experience you will leave it severely alone?"

"I shall indeed."

Ware was firm as to the lapse of only ten minutes from the time he left the library to his arrival upon the croquet lawn, accounting for all his movements at that crucial moment as he had done to Adye in the prison, and giving the identical, candid answer as to the very short distance from the garden-seat to the bathing-shed which he had given before, and which Adye had advised him to give.

But his explanation of the rings, and his having lost the first one bathing from the same spot three days after the calamity was, as his counsel always feared, a very different affair.

The Attorney-General's pencil became exceedingly energetic, and the judge asked Ware to repeat his explanation so that he might make no error in taking it down. There was no smile on the face of any one then, and many a head shook. It was, indeed, an extraordinary explanation, and his cross-examination upon the point was looked forward to with immense relish by the sight-seers. They would get value for their money then, they thought!

And they were right. Directly the Attorney-General faced his prey he attacked this part of his evidence.

"You have told my learned friend," he said, "that you lost that ring three days after your brother-in-law's death when you were bathing?"

"Yes."

"Is that true?"

"It is."

"Did you value the ring?"

"I liked it."

"Did you value it?"

"Well — er —"

"Did you value it sufficiently to buy another to take its place?"

"Well, yes, if you put it in that way."

"And on the very day after you returned to London?"

"That is when I bought it certainly."

"Was it on the *morning* of that day that you bought it?"

"I think it was."

"What time upon the afternoon before did you reach London in your car?"

"Oh, I forget — evening some time."

"Would Felkington's be closed then?"

"Very possibly."

"So I may take it, then, that you purchased that second ring at the earliest possible moment?"

"Yes."

"Why did you buy it?"

"To take the place of the other one I'd lost."

The law officer looked at him and asked very solemnly:

"So that no further risk should be run of anybody noticing that it was missing?"

"No," and Ware almost shouted the answer.

"Do you *swear* that?"

"I do."

"Were you at pains to buy one as much like the other as possible?"

"I was. I had always like the other."

"Do you wish the jury to believe that you bathed in that particular spot after the awful thing which had happened three days afterwards?"

"It's true. I swear it."

"Was anyone in the house aware of the fact?"

"No, unfortunately. It was at six in the morning. No one was down. I was restless and worried —"

"What about?"

"Money."

"You were in that condition upon the day of the boy's death, were you not?"

"Yes."

"*Equally worried?*"

"Yes."

"Is Sir Henry Egerton accurate, then, in describing you upon that day as being in excellent spirits?"

"I take it to be one's duty to hide one's feelings from one's guests sometimes. I'm glad I succeeded so well."

"Can you, then, produce no evidence whatever to corroborate your statement that you bathed upon that particular morning?"

"I cannot."

"Did you bathe upon any other mornings about that time?"

"No. That is how I am able to say that it was three days after the accident that I bathed."

"Was it a pleasant bathe?"

"In a way," was the weary answer.

"May I take it that it was not an unpleasant bathe?"

"I—I know what you mean—I!"

"*Do you?*" And the Attorney-General paused. "But had you any feeling of discomfort *at the time* in bathing in that particular spot?"

"I—I don't know. I—I can't say."

"But you were able to do it. Doesn't it strike you as being a very extraordinary thing to be able to do?"

Ware then showed evident signs of fatigue, and asked for a glass of water, which he drank nervously.

"May I sit down, my lord?" he asked rather faintly.

"Certainly," replied the judge as he looked at him over his glasses.

The tortured creature leaned back wearily upon the seat and wiped his face with his handkerchief, while his cross-examiner remained standing, calm, relentless, and motionless.

"I think you wish me to repeat the last question?" said the Attorney-General most politely.

"Please."

"Doesn't it strike you as being a very extraordinary thing to be able to do?"

"It—it does now."

"Did it then?"

"Er — no."

The Attorney-General waited before putting the next grave question:

"Isn't it a fact that you never bathed there at all after your brother-in-law's death?"

"No."

"Isn't it a fact that you lost that ring in a struggle with him when he met his death?"

The question rang out with an appalling force, and the final answer was dramatic in the extreme. Ware staggered to his feet, and swayed, and raised his voice to almost a piercing cry:

"No! Before God — No!"

His teeth chattered, and his jaw shook. He made a frantic effort to add more, but failed. It appeared then that the Attorney-General was about to pursue his terrible questions further, but Ware suddenly held up his hand to stop him.

"You must let me finish — what I was going to say," he gasped.

"By all means," was the cold answer.

"You — you have spun a web round me of — of the most appalling kind. And there are certain facts against me which I can't get over. I've only told you the truth, because I can't tell you anything else. You have assailed my moral character, and I haven't attempted to defend it. I don't defend it!"

The judge tried to stop him, but it was impossible.

"I've been as candid as I could," he continued wildly, "but when you charge me with this crime you commit one in doing so. I swear solemnly that I am innocent!"

He swayed again, and sank exhausted into the seat behind him, while the Attorney-General quietly resumed his place.

The whole thing was terrible for every one to look upon. Judge, jury, and the array of counsel, all were affected. And out of the mass of sight-seers surely there must have been some at that moment who wished that they had never come, and vowed never to repeat the experience.

Ware drank some water, and wiped his face again, while Michael Adye stood up to re-examine him shortly.

"Calm yourself, Ware," he said firmly, yet with a note of tenderness in his voice. "I know that you've been very ill, and I don't wish to make you suffer more than I can help. Just answer me as quietly and shortly as you can. You have told the Attorney-General that you have no witness to corroborate your statement as to having bathed upon that morning."

"Yes; it was only six o'clock, and no one was down."

"Quite. Tell me, what did you wear to bathe in that morning?"

"I wore nothing. Being so early, I knew no one would be about."

"What used you to wear generally when you bathed in the lake?"

"An ordinary bathing-suit."

"Where used you, as a rule, to place it afterwards?"

"On the towel-horse in my room. They would then take it away to dry it."

"If you had worn it upon this occasion you would have placed it there?"

"Yes. And I wish to heaven I had worn it! I could have been corroborated then."

"That is what was in my mind. Now, as to this signet-ring, it has been suggested that you bought the second one so that it might not be noticed that it was missing. Did you, as a fact, invariably wear it?"

"Not invariably, no. I took it off sometimes; for instance, always when I played golf. There was no sentiment attaching to the ring whatsoever."

"Might you, apart from golf, not wear it all for perhaps a whole day or so?"

"Certainly. I generally took it off when I washed, and frequently I would let it remain on my dressing-table."

"I see. As a matter of fact, after you had lost it no one commented to you upon its absence, did they?"

"No one at all."

"Nor you to them?"

"No. At that terrible time my mind was far too occupied

with graver things than the loss of a ring. The inquest was being held, and we could think of nothing else."

"And although you bought the second ring upon the day after your return to London," and Adye put this question with a satirical smile at the Attorney-General, "was there anything in the world to prevent your motoring to Felkington's, the twelve miles from Wilbury, upon any day *before* that you chose to do so, if you had been in a desperate hurry to replace the ring?"

"Nothing whatever."

"Thank you. I have nothing more to ask you."

For a moment it appeared as if the judge wished to question him, but, on seeing Ware in a state of exhaustion, he obviously refrained from doing so, and once more was the hunted man led back to the dock where the prison doctor handed him some brandy and water.

"Lady Ware!" said Adye quietly.

The beautiful woman stepped forward to the witness-box and lifted her veil to take the oath. An excited murmur ran through the court, and hundreds of admiring eyes were fixed upon her. There was a tale of suffering in her face, but it remained grand in its beauty and distinction. She did not seem to see the dock at all, and her husband, sitting there, covered his eyes with his hand. Magdalen's voice was low, but clear, and she answered Adye's questions well and shortly. She corroborated Ware's statements as to her having suggested his return to Egerton on the croquet lawn, and his ignorance of her intention to pay his debts.

"Is what your husband said true," asked Adye gently, "that you and he were not happy together?"

"Quite true," she replied, and her voice shook.

"We have heard him blame himself in that regard, so I won't ask you your view of the matter."

"I would rather, if it could be avoided," she said, with a wonderful sweetness in her tone, "that you did not ask me that. It seems so small."

"And the promised future payments of all his debts — was that an entirely voluntary action on your part?"

"Entirely. The first person to hear of it from me was my

solicitor. I wrote to him from Switzerland and gave my instructions."

"Before your departure for Switzerland, when you left your husband in England, had you spoken on the subject to him?"

"I had not."

"And he never asked you then to help him?"

"No. And I think it probable that he did not think I would do so. We—we were very wretched together—at that time."

"Lady Ware, have you arranged to pay back those two thousand pounds to Mrs. Scale?"

"Yes," she whispered. "Won't it suffice if I say that I have arranged to pay *all* his debts?"

"Certainly. I take your answer," was Adye's gentle reply.

"By your brother's death you were the sole person to benefit, were you not?"

"I was. And from the point of view of this dreadful story it was I and I alone who—would profit by my brother's death."

She raised her head proudly as she spoke those words, with her gaze fixed upon the Attorney-General.

Amongst other things, Eustace's unfinished letter to Magdalen was then gone into. She was quite candid in saying that she and her brother had not been very good friends. Further, she explained in a grief-stricken voice that on the day of his death they had had a tiff, and that ever since she had had an uneasy feeling that the letter meant that he wished to end his life. She spoke of him as a weak character, and as having a mind likely to become unbalanced, an opinion which Celia and Gurney in their evidence strongly corroborated.

As to Ware's ring, she stated positively that there were many occasions upon which he did not wear it, and that its absence from his finger would in no way surprise her.

After a fairly long examination Adye put this final question to her:

"Lady Ware, knowing your husband as you do, and con-

sidering carefully all the circumstances in this case, have you ever for one single moment doubted his innocence?"

"Never. And I never shall."

The Attorney-General did his utmost to get from her some admission of her husband's possibly entertaining the notion that on Eustace's death she would assist him in his financial difficulties. But he was doomed to failure. Indeed, under cross-examination she became firmer than ever in her answers. Her courage was magnificent, and her womanly protection of the man who had treated her so shamefully evoked the admiration of all. To look at her then, facing the crowded court with all her quiet dignity, no one would have guessed the amount of her suffering. Her self-control was marvellous. And at this awful moment the sordid details, which had been exposed, seemed to her in her own words "so small." She was there simply to fight for her husband's life.

"Do you seriously mean to tell us," asked the Attorney-General, "that you believe your brother died by his own hand?"

"I do. I shall never get it out of my mind that that was really what his letter to me meant. I think he went to that lake in a wretched state and that he — perhaps — grasped his own throat wildly, and that then, being an extremely weak swimmer, he — he — he was drowned."

"You spoke of a tiff you had with him. Would merely a tiff have put him into such a frame of mind as that?"

"We had some bitter words, Eustace and I."

Her voice died away with this answer. She was greatly moved.

"And this theory you base solely upon that unfinished letter?"

"Yes — and also that I don't believe *anybody* killed him. The poor boy hadn't a single real enemy in the world."

"At the time, Lady Ware, you knew nothing of your husband's early bathe in the same spot three days afterwards?"

"I did not. My — my husband and I were barely speaking."

"Don't you think the story a somewhat remarkable one — that he was *able* to do such a thing?"

"No, I do not."

"Do you mean that, Lady Ware?" inquired the judge gravely.

"I do, and I will give my reason. I consider my husband an *abnormal* man."

"An *abnormal* man!" exclaimed the Attorney-General.

"Yes, an abnormal man," was the defiant retort.

"But you don't consider him so abnormal as to be able to commit murder?"

"No," she answered loudly. "To be morally bad is one thing. To be criminally bad is another."

The answer created a stir of sympathy in the court, and a raucous voice from the gallery rang out — "'ear 'ear!"

"Silence!" exclaimed the judge sternly. "If there's the slightest sign of anything of that sort again I'll clear the court instantly."

The Attorney-General finally concluded his cross-examination of her. Adye asked her no further questions, and Magdalen returned to her seat having won the admiration of all.

Men whispered to each other, many a woman wiped away her tears, and the Attorney-General surreptitiously passed across his juniors to Michael Adye a hastily pencilled note. It read thus: "A fine woman and a fine witness."

Adye then called: "Thomas Bold."

"Who? What name?" asked the Attorney-General, who, in the hubbub had failed to hear it.

"Bold," replied Adye, with just a suggestion of triumph in his voice, "B-o-l-d."

But he was a very different looking Tommy Bold from the one who came to Adye's chambers. Charles Bodsell, the clever solicitor, had seen to that. He was carefully shaved. His hair was carefully brushed. A neat suit had been provided for him, and a clean collar and quiet neck-tie made a great transformation. He looked "most respectable" as he stood in the witness-box. The only thing that no human hands could change was the stamp of death upon his face.

"May I sit down, my lord?" he asked in a terribly weak voice. "I—I have consumption, and it would help me."

He then looked with that ominous glassy stare of his at the dock.

And Ware leaned forward.

Adye then took him through his remarkable story; his former prosperity as a bookmaker, his fall upon a charge of obtaining money by false pretences, his subsequent decline and poverty, and his arrival at Wilbury on the fatal date to beg for help from Ware. He was then asked to say when he first communicated with the prisoner's advisers, and told the story which he was now about to repeat on oath. He gave the date in December, and explained why he had not been able to make any communication before. He admitted in a frank manner that he had been in prison for two months for theft—the theft having taken the form of food to keep him alive, and that he only heard of the charge against Sir Hubert Ware the day after he came out of the prison infirmary and regained his freedom. Thus did Adye place all his cards upon the table, and with this introduction the man proceeded to unfold all that he did and saw upon that day at Wilbury. Adye was careful, too, to show by his questions that he would be corroborated by Marston Gurney and Rate.

Every one listened with wrapped attention to the bookmaker, and when, in his story, he reached the lake, there was increased interest. Even the Attorney-General was noticed to enter into a short but animated whispered conversation with one of his juniors.

All that he had told Adye before in King's Bench Walk, he repeated word for word, but more under control. The judge was plainly startled by the tale, and constantly asked him to repeat his answers so that he might take down the actual words, and the jury, one and all, leaned forward and never removed their eyes from the witness.

The only new fact which Bold added to the account which he had given to Adye and Bodsell was that he returned to London by train at about five—there were frequent trains—and that he had asked the booking-clerk when he took his ticket, what had won the St. Leger, and expressed the hope to

him that he had backed "Aeroplane." This additional point went to show that he could have seen what he swore he saw before leaving Wilbury. Michael Adye in this regard volunteered to the judge that he had the booking-clerk present to corroborate this should it be necessary to call him. The astute K.C. knew well enough that with Tommy Bold's record anything that they could secure to support the truth of his story was important.

The Attorney-General was equally aware that if this witness was believed by the jury there was an end of the case.

He tried by every legitimate means to shatter the man's credibility. He induced him very adroitly to make every possible excuse for the two offences of which he had been convicted, and then asked him pointedly:

"But you were convicted on each occasion?"

"I was," answered the weak voice.

"Justly convicted?"

"Well, sir, I suppose so."

"Did you plead guilty to either of the charges?"

"No."

"You said they were false up till the end?"

"Yes, sir, I did. I meant to ride to the finish."

"When you came out of prison last month how did you first hear of this charge against the prisoner?"

"From the paper, sir."

"So I thought. Did you buy the paper on that day?"

"Yes."

"With an account of the police court proceedings in it?"

The Attorney-General knew when he put the question that there were no police court proceedings reported on that day, but that Ware had been committed for trial before that date.

"I don't understand you, sir."

"Don't you? Don't you, with your record, know as much about police court proceedings as anyone? Answer the question. When you read of the case against the prisoner, was it in a report of the police court proceedings?"

Bold paused for a moment, and then answered as strongly as he could:

"No, sir."

The Attorney-General was disappointed.

"What was it, then?"

"A sort of paragraph just referring to the case, and saying that you were going to prosecute and Mr. Adye defend."

Michael Adye's face broadened out into a big smile.

"Was that all it said?"

"No, sir, not quite. It wasn't very long, but it had a heading to it."

"No doubt you're accurate upon that point," interrupted the Attorney-General with a laugh. "What else had it?"

"It just said in a short sort of way what Sir Hubert was charged with — drowning his brother-in-law, Eustace Ede, in the Wilbury lake. Not much more."

"And simply on the top of that you told your story to the prisoner's advisers?"

"Yes."

"When you went to give them that story you knew, did you not, that it contradicted in detail the case for the prosecution?"

"Yes, sir."

"How did you know that?" And the Attorney-General raised his voice very sharply.

"How did I know it?"

"That was my question."

"Why, sir, from — from the paragraph I've told you of."

"That *short* paragraph!"

"Yes. That was enough for me. I had seen the young gentleman bathing, and he was all alone."

"But that paragraph contained no details, and yet you tell me that when you went to tell your story you knew that it contradicted in detail the case for the prosecution."

"Well, sir, so it does. The prosecution charges Sir Hubert with drowning his brother-in-law. And I saw the young gentleman bathing alone. That was enough for me."

"And on the strength of that paragraph only you go to the prisoner's legal advisers and give them all these elaborate details — such as the dead boy falling in the punt and hitting his head, and the rest?"

"Yes."

"Bold, on your oath, did not you take good care to buy all the newspapers you could, containing accounts of the police court proceedings before you went to tell your story?"

"No, sir, I did not."

Michael Adye then re-examined him very shortly.

"Bold, have you anything in the world to gain," he asked, "by telling this story?"

"Nothing, sir. I'm leaving the world very soon. I — I'm a doomed man. But before I go — I — mean — to try to save — an innocent man."

"By telling the truth?" said Adye gravely.

"Yes, God help me!"

After such sensational evidence as this everything else was an anti-cimax, and it need only be recorded that Marston Gurney, Celia, Rate, and the railway-clerk who sold the ticket to Tommy Bold were examined by Adye's junior, Arthur Flake. They all gave valuable evidence in support of the defence, but the stage had been reached when every one was impatient for Adye's speech. It was then four o'clock on the Friday afternoon, and the evidence was closed. There occurred at once one of those little episodes in a big trial which are not uncommon. Michael Adye had to address the jury before the Attorney-General. The Attorney-General was to have the last word. And as Adye looked at the clock with an expression of fatigue, the judge was quick to see what was passing through his mind. He knew well enough that Adye would prefer to deliver his speech the next morning, and thus be on more equal terms with his opponent, who otherwise would have the field to himself. Accordingly, he asked Adye if he would prefer to have the court adjourned then until the following day. Adye said that it would suit him better, and Mr. Justice Petworth informed the jury that he intended to sit late to-morrow in order to finish the case, so that the jury need not be "locked up" over the Sunday. The jury acquiesced in the suggestion readily, and before many minutes the great arena was cleared.

The excitement was transferred to the crowded streets outside.

The name of Tommy Bold was on everybody's lips, specu-

lation was rife as to the approaching verdict, the prevailing opinion being that, however brilliant the speeches from the Bar might be, the result would depend upon the judge's summing up and the view that he took — and many new bets were made.

CHAPTER XXX

THE Saturday morning came. It was the final day of the great trial. The result was a rush by the public upon an unprecedented scale. The patience of the police and all officials was greatly taxed. The street was a pandemonium, the fight at the doors of the great court-house revolting, men using their elbows and women shrieking out.

It was an indecent business.

And in the midst of it all the prisoner took his seat in the dock for the last time. He looked grievously ill and strained. Upon that night his fate was to be decreed. It meant freedom or death; nothing less. And all the world watched him!

A great task lay before Michael Adye. He knew that, and he felt it more than anyone else in the court. But he rose with a quiet confidence to deliver a masterly effort amid the hush of the crowd. His words flowed like a torrent from the beginning to the end. He never looked at a note. One glance at the torn woman who sat below him and he was inspired.

"May it please your lordship. Gentlemen of the jury," he began, "I don't want to flatter. It's not my way. And it isn't necessary. But I can't help saying this with all the sincerity that's in me: the prisoner at the Bar is a fortunate man in several respects. His prosecution is being conducted by the Attorney-General with all the fairness which invariably distinguishes him; his trial is presided over, if I may say so with the greatest respect, by one of the learned judges of England who is renowned for his scrupulous care and impartiality; his case is being tried by you twelve gentlemen in whose hands his fate lies, and, speaking for myself, I can only thank you for the patience you have shown me and which I will confidently rely upon for a little longer; and last, but by no means least, his very life is being fought for by a woman who is his wife, a woman who, if I am any judge

of character, has here in this court in your presence brought down upon her head not only the sympathy, but the admiration and the respect of all. In these days of scepticism, when the world seems packed with cynics and often to be bereft of all that is fine and noble, you and I, aye! and every soul in this court, will be able to look back upon this terrible story, this ghastly accusation with its hideous details, with a feeling of gratitude to that woman who has shown us *all*, men and women, old and young, that human nature has beauty in it still, and that her sex is to be revered. The picture of that brave and fearless figure as it stood in that box will remain, I *know*, in the memories of us all. Thank God we have seen it!"

His voice shook violently as he uttered the words, and he paused for a moment to master himself.

"But, gentlemen," he went on, "it is not upon that recollection that I'm going to ask you with an unbounded confidence to acquit the man at the bar. I would not insult your intelligence by doing so. It is upon the evidence you have heard — upon the *facts*, and upon the facts alone. Cast all sentiment from you! *Fling* it away! And as shrewd, hard-headed, common-sense men of the world see if you, or any *one* of you, when you review this case in its entirety, can conscientiously send that man to his death, remembering what I know my lord will tell you — that no prisoner in England has to prove his innocence, but that the burden upon the prosecution is to establish his guilt to the satisfaction of a jury, beyond all reasonable doubt.

"Have they done that? Have they, indeed, done anything like it? I submit to you that they have failed hopelessly, and more than that, gentlemen, I submit that the defence has done, beyond all dispute, what it is not bound to do — established the prisoner's innocence.

"Let us examine the evidence in this extraordinary story — one of the most extraordinary in criminal annals."

Then with amazing skill he marshalled his facts in perfect chronological order, dove-tailing in every detail which helped him, and presenting the defence to the jury in what seemed to be an incontestable and overwhelming manner.

At moments he rose to great eloquence, and then, with quiet logic, he analyzed and dissected the minutest points. One of these deserves mention. The fact that Ware was able to bathe in that lake three days after the calamity he knew to be an exceedingly difficult one to surmount. He had seen, too, that it made a strong impression upon the jury. He recognized further that the judge had taken careful note of it. But he did not shirk it.

"My learned friend, gentlemen," he said, "is going to urge it upon you that it was a most amazing thing for the prisoner to have done, and he will invite you to say that it is not credible that an innocent man could *bring* himself to bathe where only three days before his brother-in-law had lost his life. I will put it to you in a different light, and in the one which I believe you will accept—that it is *inconceivable* that a guilty man could be *able*, three days after his commission of that crime, to go near the spot at all!"

He waited for his point to make its effect, and he went on:

"And remember this, gentlemen. That ring was not found when they dragged the lake the first time and recovered the body. It was found upon the second occasion weeks afterwards. That fact, then, it is incontestable, is consistent at any rate with the prisoner's loss of the ring *after* Eustace Ede's death. It is, too, I submit, some corroboration of Sir Hubert Ware's story, of which he showed you frankly he stood in such sore need."

He then attacked every essential fragment of the case at great length, and finally reached his peroration:

"Gentlemen," he said, and he paused, "in conclusion I should like to say that no judge or advocate has ever differentiated between sin and crime more accurately than Lady Ware. She said in that box, and her words will always ring in my memory—'To be morally bad is one thing. To be criminally bad is another.' The prisoner's moral character has been laid bare to you in all its ugliness. I hold no brief for that! I am not here to defend that! And recollect that he himself has not sought to defend it. I make bold to say that there are many persons here in this crowded court who would not care to publish their full his-

tories to the world. But they *need not be murderers!* The same with Bold the bookmaker, whom you saw leave the court a moment ago; he sought to hide nothing from you. He told you he had been twice convicted. He told you he had been in gaol. But it does not follow that here, in this court, he is committing the crime of perjury. Is no prisoner who has paid his price ever to be allowed to rise? Can he never tell the truth again? Is he for ever to be branded without a chance? The Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society doesn't think so. Can *any* fair-minded man, with a heart beating in his body, think so? And what has the wretched man to gain? Look at him, and look at him well. There is a point in his evidence, the truth of which even my learned friend will not dispute, I know. Bold said he was a doomed man. Can't we *all*, gentlemen, believe that? Death is stamped upon his face, and he is standing on that dark threshold which separates us here from the great, unknown world beyond. He has but one step to take. Would he, *could* he, take it with such a lie upon his lips? Ask yourselves that, gentlemen, and I am confident of the answer, as I am equally confident that you will not only find by your verdict that the prosecution have failed to prove the prisoner's guilt, but that the evidence for his defence has, *without any doubt whatsoever*, proved his innocence *up to the very hilt.*"

The force with which he spoke, and the deep feeling and conviction in his tone, carried the court away, and loud uncontrollable applause broke forth. The judge himself had been very moved, and left it to the usher to command silence. And when all was still the Attorney-General rose to reply. Fervour and eloquence gave place to calm, cold argument. It was a striking contrast.

He paid a great tribute to his learned friend, and then in cold, deliberate tones he proceeded tactfully to remind the jury of the oath which they had taken, and advised them to banish everything from their minds but the evidence, in accordance with which their verdict must be given. He agreed with the eloquent speech just delivered that the prosecution had to satisfy a jury beyond all reasonable

doubt of a prisoner's guilt, and that it was not incumbent upon the defence to establish the prisoner's innocence.

"But, gentlemen," he said frigidly, "have not the prosecution proved the guilt of this prisoner at the bar? Can you disbelieve the evidence? Is it not beyond suspicion? Then ask yourselves if that for the defence is equally reliable beyond the serious admissions made by the prisoner himself in the box. As to Lady Ware, however sympathetic you and I may feel, when we have a solemn duty to perform we must be sensible. And although the world may often be sceptical and cynical, I venture to say, and I think you will agree with me, that there are few wives who, being placed in a like position, would not have acted in exactly the same way. She strenuously denies that there ever was any communication between her and the prisoner as to her paying his debts after the death of the boy. Assuming that to be true, and God forbid that we should blame her if it is not true!—we have seen her in the box, and we have seen what she will endure for that man, we have seen that she possesses fine qualities, and in that regard I am as ready to pay my tribute to her as is my learned friend; *but*, gentlemen, with that generous nature, which her husband recognized full well, is it not at least conceivable that, communication or no communication between them, he might have had a *very shrewd opinion* that she would rescue him from his difficulties. At any rate," and the advocate lowered his voice impressively, "she *did* rescue him. And I assert unhesitatingly that that boy's death meant everything to that man. Gentlemen, his wife described him as—'an abnormal man.' I don't know what you thought of that definition. But it was a *remarkable* one—wasn't it? And from the point of view of the prosecution it is the most accurate description that could be given of him."

The Attorney-General then paused, and added in a low, icy tone, while he leaned well forward towards the jury-box:

"He — *is* — an — abnormal — man."

Like his great opponent, he knew how to allow time for his effects to travel. He waited again.

But Magdalen, whose sufferings were beyond all comprehension, fell forward suddenly in her seat and fainted.

There was a great commotion, and eventually, amid a tense sympathy and excitement, she was carried from the court.

Ware stood up with difficulty in the dock to look, but he quickly looked away again and closed his eyes. He could not bear to look. He was not abnormal then.

CHAPTER XXXI

AFTER this painful scene the Attorney-General was able to resume his deadly analysis of the case, and the jury, throughout his long speech, accorded him the same patient attention as they had given to Adye. It was quite impossible to tell from their faces what verdict they would find.

Some people in this regard profess a superior wisdom, and assert that generally they can tell which way the jury is leaning. Very often, however, they are woefully deceived.

Adye's great speech, from which but a fragment has been recorded here, lasted until five o'clock, when the Attorney-General commenced his, and was expected to occupy two or three hours.

But it was seven o'clock before Celia, with the assistance of the doctor who had been summoned, was able to remove Magdalen to her house in Bruton Street in a state of collapse. She could endure no more. On her arrival everything was done to induce her to go to bed, but she refused.

"Let me stay as I am," she cried, "don't thwart me. I must do as I like, or I shall go mad."

Hour after hour passed as she lay in her clothes upon the bed. She scarcely spoke a word. At moments Celia feared that she had lost consciousness again, she remained so still. At last the striking of a clock startled her, and she sat up with an unnatural strength.

"What time's that?" she cried fearfully.

"Ten, dear," answered Celia.

"Three hours since you got me home, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"It's three *years*."

Silence again for only a few minutes, and the same question was repeated.

"What's the time?"

"Just after ten, dear."

"I'll go down—I'll go down!"

"Where?"

"To the morning-room—I *can't* lie here any more."

Persuasion was useless. She reached the morning-room as if in a trance, and sank upon the sofa. Celia tried her utmost to induce her to take some beef-tea, but without avail.

"Darling, you'll be very ill if you don't take something."

"I don't care if I am," she exclaimed. "I want to be ill—I want to be ill—I want to die!"

The girl endeavoured fruitlessly to stop her.

"Let me go on, let me go on," she continued frantically.

"It doesn't matter what I say or do. A million thoughts are rushing through my brain, and if I don't speak them—shriek them out, I shall go mad. I believe I *am* mad already! I—I've tried to stand all this well, Celia, and I didn't think I should break down like that at the last. It was weak of me—miserably weak! I wanted to be there—to support him against the fiends who've put this net round him; to show myself the one soul who, whatever he'd been in the past, believed in his innocence and knew him incapable of such a devilish act. And I'm *not* there! I'm *here—here*—stifling in this room, a helpless, pampered creature no use to anybody—no use to *him!*"

"Dear Magda, what good could you do?"

"He's my husband, and is being tried for his life!—What's the time?"

"A few minutes after ten."

"How far have they got now, I wonder?"

"I should think, dear, the judge must nearly have finished his summing up."

"It's all guess-work, nothing else. He may have finished for all we know, and that jury may be out considering—considering!"

She moved from chair to chair, clutching first at one thing, then at another. Her agony was appalling for her friend to see.

"Celia! What effect was the Attorney-General's speech making on the jury? I couldn't see them. Everything went round."

"I don't know, Magda. But Mr. Adye's speech moved everyone and would take a deal of undoing."

"Yes, yes," she almost whispered. "It was magnificent. Surely they could send no man to his death after such an argument as that! But tell me—tell me, for God's sake, that you don't think that too much has been admitted against Hubert's character. That's been haunting me! If by any chance *my* evidence could—!"

"It commanded the admiration of all, dear. And the frankness of Sir Hubert's own admissions would surely tell in his favour."

The girl hid all the fears that she may have had herself, and said anything to maintain her friend's fortitude.

"I never saw such courage," Magdalen went on. "His final answer to the Attorney-General was a supreme moment to me. It revolutionized with a flash the last three years of my life. It dimmed them—blotted them out. Yes, Celia, from that instant I forgave all—and I forgot all!"

Celia took her hand tenderly and stroked her forehead.

"Ah, you understand, don't you?" continued Magdalen. "If ever in this world a past was atoned for, it was then. His suffering! His agony! Think of it!"

"All will be well, though."

"You're not saying that merely to prop me up? You think so really? What's the time?"

"Twenty past ten."

"And still not a word! It's as if we were in another hemisphere!"

But the telephone on the desk rang loudly at that moment. It annihilated all distance. Magdalen stared at it fearfully.

"Ah-h!" she cried, "that may be something."

Before Celia could stop her she rushed madly to the instrument.

"I must know whether it is or not."

And with her hand trembling violently she unhooked the receiver.

"Yes?—I—I can't hear.—No!"

She hung up the instrument again in despair.

"Nothing?" asked Celia timidly.

"No. It was another wretched paper asking for more photographs of Wilbury. These people are torturing me!"

But the folding doors were then opened quickly, and Rate in his overcoat stood between them. The maddened woman put her hand to her mouth as she looked at him.

"I've come straight from the court, my lady," said the butler. "The judge has finished his summing up, and the jury are out."

"*When* — when did he finish?"

"At a quarter past nine, my lady."

"Over an hour ago!"

"I waited a bit, my lady, and then the difficulty in getting through the crowd in the street. Thousands, my lady, and to a man, I think, they're for Sir Hubert."

Rate was human enough when he was put to it. He did all he could to support his unhappy mistress.

"Some of them recognized me, my lady, and gave me a cheer. Then I got a taxi to come and tell your ladyship the news."

"Tell me quick! How did the judge sum up?"

"Well, my lady, they said in court he was very fair. He went neither one side more than the other."

"Not — !"

"No, he sort of weighed the evidence for and against, and said the responsibility was the jury's. At first he started off strongly in Sir Hubert's favour. Then he seemed to go the other way."

"Ah, don't say that! Don't tell me that!"

"He didn't attach much importance to the theory of suicide, my lady. He said the doctor's evidence was against that. He evidently doesn't believe the marks on the throat could have been done by Mr. Eustace himself. Then, my lady, he asked a question very seriously."

"What — what was that?"

"If some other person did cause the marks, are you satisfied, or are you not, that that person was the prisoner?' Those were his very words, my lady. Then he said, my lady, that the examination of Bold's evidence was most important. 'Do you accept it?' he asked."

"Yes — yes?"

"And then, my lady, he went into the ring question at great length, and gave the two versions. But every one thought he was fair the way he gave both sides."

"And the jury? What — what about them?"

"Difficult to say, my lady. They're a heavy-looking lot at the best, but it's the one in the back row with the red beard I don't like the looks of."

"And Sir Hubert? — How — how *was* he, Rate?" And she shook as she asked this question.

"As well as could be expected, my lady. But he looked pale and ill."

"Did — did you leave him in court?"

"No, my lady — they took him below."

Magdalen, with a cry, walked aimlessly to the window, and drew back the curtain, gazing wildly out through the panes.

"The taxi's waiting for me, my lady, so I think I'll go back."

"Yes — go — go!"

Her back was turned to Celia, whom she did not see beckon to Rate, and go out into the hall with him.

"Tell me, Rate," whispered Celia, "is there anything you can tell me that you'd rather her ladyship didn't know?"

"Only that there's grave doubt about the verdict, m'm. Most think the jury ought to be back by now if — if they mean to find not guilty."

Celia was terribly distressed, and instructed Rate before he went back to the court to disconnect the telephone altogether.

"The news mustn't reach her ladyship suddenly like that," she said breathlessly. She then returned to Magdalen.

"What's the time?" came again her monotonous question. Every minute was a life-time to her.

The chattering sight-seers in court, now awaiting the verdict with phenomenal excitement, little knew the suffering of this woman now. Did a single one of them give her a thought? Did they picture Ware's torment in the cells below? Did they picture anything but their own morbid crav-

ing for sensation? Every minute that the hand of the clock jerked forward, without a sign from the jury, added to it! And most of them would feed on it for weeks!

"Half past ten," replied Celia.

"An hour and a quarter out! Celia, this will kill me!"

The poor soul barely knew what she was saying.

"There, they're sitting," she went on, "those twelve brilliant specimens of mankind. Can't you picture them — sitting round their hideous table, smoking their foul pipes and considering — considering!"

"Still, darling, they may come to a right conclusion —"

"But why haven't they ages ago? Why should they even leave the jury-box?"

"Oh, they always do, dear, in a murder case, Marston told me."

"*Always* do! *Always* do!" she rushed on inconsequently. "That's the eternal cry in every department in this sheep-like country. 'They *always* do this — they *always* do that!' Why, for a change, can't they wake up and *never* do it?"

She opened the window without knowing why, and there immediately fell upon her ears the raucous voices of the newspaper-sellers bawling in the streets.

"Waiting for the verdict! Excitement in court! Judge's summing up! Great sensation! Speshall!"

Magdalen banged the window to drown the cries, and, with her eyes fast closed, supported herself by the curtains. Her very breathing could be heard quivering, and her lips moved rapidly. They were muttering — muttering — muttering, but not a word was heard. Celia watched her with growing anxiety, and then all became plain to her. The next instant the imploring creature was on her knees with her arms outstretched and her hands clasped in front of her. And Celia turned her eyes away.

A moment later the folding-doors were opened again. Michael Adye and Marston Gurney were there, and they lowered their heads before what they saw.

An awful silence followed as Magdalen struggled to her feet and looked at them wide-eyed.

"Is it — is it — over?" she whispered.

"Not yet," replied Adye solemnly.

"Why — why have you both — left the court?"

"The suspense became unendurable," said Gurney.

"There's nothing more that I can do, Magdalen," murmured Adye. "And I wanted to know — how you were."

"I! I! No one must think of *me*!"

"The jury haven't returned?" asked Celia under her breath.

"Not when we came away," Gurney answered. "But soon after Rate left I thought they wouldn't be long."

"Why?" gasped Magdalen.

"Because they sent a note to the judge."

"A note?"

"No doubt asking some question," explained Adye gently.

"The judge sent back his reply from his private room."

"How do you know?"

"I saw the Clerk of the Court bring it through."

"And that generally means they agree soon afterwards, doesn't it, Adye?" asked Gurney quickly.

"Very often."

"But here it means nothing of the kind," exclaimed Magdalen. "Ah! — Suppose they can't agree?"

No one answered.

"What then? Tell me!"

"There would have to be a fresh trial," replied Adye.

"Oh-h! He would have to go through this again?"

"Magdalen," he went on, and he was barely able to speak, "it's dreadful for me to have to increase your suffering. I — I will — go back — to the court."

"No, no — don't leave me — don't leave me! — I may — need you greatly — I mean — if — if they find Hubert —!"

"You musn't speak of that yet," was the feeling reply.

"Then you think there's a hope — a real hope?"

"There's — always a hope."

An extraordinary change then came to Magdalen. Her pride suddenly rushed to her rescue, and a feeling that her outward sufferings must be terrible to Adye. Women at the most solemn moments can think of these things somehow.

Their self-control and their unselfishness can be superhuman. She drew herself up and walked to the doors during the silence that followed, and Celia asked her where she was going.

"Just to move about a little," she said bravely. "I—I'm restless."

She opened the doors, and, with Celia supporting her, turned to the two men.

"You'll find cigars and cigarettes there," she said with a wan smile. "I'll come back directly."

Then she held out her delicate hand to Michael Adye, who hid it in his with a strength which she understood. She then closed the doors, and after this strange effort, put upon herself by her thought for others, she paced the hall wildly for five minutes by the clock, and never spoke.

CHAPTER XXXII

SUCH was the torture of the two chief actors in the drama, the woman lashed to the breaking-point, and the man in the cells sitting numb with the sweat of agony on his face — waiting for life or death.

As to the others, the great advocate who had defended him with all the strength of his mind and body, and whose very heart-strings had been torn from him by the woman he loved, sat silent in her morning-room. Marston Gurney remained with him, but he did not realize it. What was the future to be? Had he done his best? Had he won — *and lost?* And grave doubts afflicted him.

And, then, the judge sitting in his private room at the great court-house, the man of power who had tried to use it well. Had he omitted anything important in the prisoner's favour? Had he given due and impartial consideration to the defence as well as to the prosecution? Had he given the same prominence to both sides of the case? Had his complete and calm exposition of the story been of that assistance to the jury which he had striven conscientiously, in accordance with his great office, to make it?

Would his summing up lead them to the pronouncement of a just verdict? Had he held the scales evenly? Had he done his utmost to fulfil that splendid duty which he had been appointed to discharge — the duty of seeing that justice is done? These were but a few of the questions which were passing through *his* mind. But does a single member of the crowd realize the burden of such a trial as this to a judge? To them it is more than likely that he begins and ends with red and ermine. Why, a man's life is literally in his hands! And that life must be forfeit if it is just. Mr. Justice Petworth was experienced, but to him it was by far the most momentous case that he had ever tried. He felt it

acutely. Underneath the red and ermine there was a heart, and there were nerves. The first would often appear upon his robe sleeve, but the last were hidden away securely. It required an intimate to see when he was strained, and at his moment of waiting he was strained enormously. He wished nobody to remain near him. Ordinarily he detested solitude. He had taken off his wig and thrown it on the table, and his clerk, who withdrew in silence immediately afterwards, had brought some tea and bread and butter. But though the tea was taken he could eat nothing. Again, as a rule he was a pipe smoker only, but under these conditions the clerk never failed to place a box of cigarettes in readiness for him. Two or three upon this night he smoked half through as the time of waiting for the verdict dragged on. And up and down the small room he walked, like many another human being whose mind is obsessed with a great thing. At times he stopped, and from fatigue lay down upon the leather-covered sofa. Often he closed his eyes, only to open them at the slightest sound. Then another tramp, and many a heavy sigh. What was his duty to be? Was he going to be able to set that man free of this charge for ever? Or was he about to pronounce that awful doom of death, the passing of which invariably shook him grievously? Everything has its price; and make no mistake about it—a judge pays heavily.

The written question from the jury was brought to him by the Clerk of the Court when he was trying to rest upon the sofa. These questions, asking for the guidance of the impartial man, are sometimes foolish and often unnecessary. Generally they demand a carefully worded answer. The question here was—"Ought we to disregard altogether Bold's evidence on the ground of his record?"

Mr. Justice Petworth read it silently, and sat down at the table. He was about to write his reply at once, but he stopped and, ignoring the presence of the messenger, paced the room in deep thought two or three times. It was in a sense a vital question demanding a vital answer. Again he seated himself at the table and wrote—"My answer is in the negative, but as I have said to you, his record cannot be

ignored. You must give it your full consideration while testing the accuracy of his evidence."

He read it through carefully and placed it in an envelope, and the Clerk of the Court took it to the jury-room, and could hear through the door, before he opened it, an excited altercation. Some of the twelve men were fighting verbally over the man's life.

Thus each actor in the drama was filling his part to the best of his ability. It was a stupendous ordeal for all.

Adye had not opened his lips to Gurney since Magdalen left them, and at the end of a long five minutes she returned to the morning-room. Gurney caught sight of his wife through the open doors and joined her, leaving Magdalen and Adye alone.

This was the first time that they had been able to look into each other's eyes after the great effort of the K.C. for her husband.

She then sat down near the fire and stared at it.

"I—I don't know how—to thank you," she murmured.

"You're not to try to do that." And with the words he took her hand in his. It was the grasp of a real friend. "I think you know how I'm feeling for you."

"Yes—I know," she replied, as she removed her hand. "But very likely you don't realize—all that's going through my mind."

"I think I can."

"Not all. I—I'm a changed woman since—since all this—a different being. It's not I who am responsible for it—but my husband."

"How do you mean?" he asked steadily.

"This—this awful suffering of his is his—atonement for all that is past."

"All that is—past?"

"Yes, for all. I—I am his sole protector now, and I forgive him everything! If justice could bring him back to me I—I am ready to begin—again. Do you understand?"

Michael Adye looked out in front of him fixedly.

"Yes, Magdalen," he answered.

She had spoken quietly but with great emotion. Then she suddenly rose to her feet in fear.

"But justice won't," she cried. "There ~~is~~ no justice! Some devil is at work to crush him—to cheat him out of the effort to be better. Michael! they're going to find an innocent man guilty. They're finding him guilty at this very moment while you and I are here. I know it! I feel it! Help me, Michael! What shall I do? What *shall* I do? This is killing me. It's a crime they're committing! It's an infamy!"

"Courage, Magdalen—courage!"

But she continued madly:

"I've not been merciful enough to him! I've never made an excuse for him! I could have been less hard! I know I could! I might have appealed to his better side—been more patient, more tolerant! Oh, Michael, I have everything to reproach myself with now!"

Adye stood up too. The words were unendurable to him.

"You have nothing to reproach yourself with," he exclaimed vehemently. "No woman who ever lived could have behaved more finely than you have done!"

"Finely? I—I feel contemptible!"

"Contemptible! You contemptible!—*You!*"

"Utterly! What have my trials been, all piled up together, compared with his sufferings now? And I might have prevented them?"

"How?"

"By never allowing this fiendish *motive* to arise—this cursed fabricated thing that's dragging him down. I could have stopped that! I see it now, Michael. If when I saw the recklessness of his life I had acted differently—taken him into my confidence—I might have saved him from his ruin!"

Adye swept round and faced her. He knew more than she knew, and he would not have her blame herself.

"You never could have saved him from that," he cried. "You never could have saved him from anything! And knowing you as I do—and knowing him—I can't and won't *allow* you to say what you're saying to me now."

"Allow!" she exclaimed.

"No!"

"I—I always thought you had a heart. Are you as hard as all the rest? There's no charity in the world! Don't you pity him? Can't you pity him?"

"At the present moment," he answered with all his strength, "I pity him from my soul. *But* for the past, where you are concerned—" He stopped suddenly and looked round. Magdalen did the same, with her hand held to her mouth fearfully. A strange sound had broken in upon them, and they held their breath.

"That's—that's—the bang—of the front door," whispered Magdalen.

And they both waited. News from the court had come! They knew it! They felt it! And Magdalen took an unsteady step forward, while Adye stood motionless and pale looking at her. The verdict was out! Had he won *and lost*? Or had he lost *and won*?

It was the most awful suspense of all, and horror was written on Magdalen's face.

"Michael—!" she screamed, as she shivered from head to foot and clutched his arm madly. Then a moment later the doors opened slowly.

Ware stood in the opening. He was a free man.

His look was indescribable. He seemed to realize nothing.

He gave one plaintive glance at his wife, and bowed his head. He was unable to speak. Then Magdalen, like in a dream, fixed her eyes upon him, and with an effort staggered towards him. The next moment her arms were about his neck, and she was sobbing like a child.

Thus they remained for some seconds, and Adye looked away. Then Ware put out a hand feebly as if for support, and with Magdalen's help he finally reached a chair by a table and sank into it. His eyes met Adye's, and the meaning in them was unspeakable. The K.C. was deeply moved, and approached Ware slowly. He took his hand, and, after a look at Magdalen, walked out into the hall in silence, closing the doors behind him softly.

It was an immense moment in the lives of the three.

The wife looked at the husband, bent and ill from the strain, and in his face were the years which the last few hours had given him. And then, as ever, the woman in her was revealed. All that she had endured was forgotten. There was only one sufferer in the world, and she ministered to him.

She took a cushion from the sofa and placed it gently behind his back.

She drew a footstool from the fireplace and put it at his feet.

"Thank you. I—" and his weak voice died away.

"Don't try to speak," she answered tenderly.

And he closed his eyes feebly, while Rate came through from the dining-room, carrying upon a tray an opened bottle of champagne, two glasses and some biscuits, and placing them upon the table by Ware's side.

"I—I brought this for Sir Hubert, my lady. I think your ladyship should make him take it," he said falteringly.

He then filled one glass with the wine.

"Thank you, Rate," said Magdalen through her tears.

"My lady, I—I—I—"

But Rate's usual volubility forsook him, and his voice trembled. The next instant Magdalen pressed his hand in hers. Here again were classes levelled up. Then the husband and wife were left alone once more.

"Rate's right, Hubert. Drink this." And she handed him the glass.

"What?" he asked quite dazed. "No—no—I don't thing—I can."

"Try."

"Perhaps—presently."

"Have you had—food, Hubert?"

"No—no," was the faint reply. "Everything—failed me—to-day. I—couldn't."

"You've had nothing?"

"Yes—something—at eight this morning. I've—I've not been able—to manage anything—since. They—they

were awfully good to me — and all that, but — I couldn't. I — I'm beyond it."

Then after an effort to speak he shivered violently.

"Is — is it cold here — or is it my fancy?" he asked.

She again handed the glass to him and said:

"Try now — for my sake. It will warm you."

"Very well — yes —" And he barely sipped the wine. Then at its taste, as if he thought that it might revive him, he drank off the glass, and gasped for his breath. "You were right, Magdalen," he continued more strongly. "That's the best thing I could take. I — I should like more. It — it might help me."

She filled a second glass rapidly, and he took it from her greedily.

"You've got so thin," said Magdalen gently.

"Yes," he answered with a tinge of recklessness in his voice. "I've lost a couple of stone, they tell me. — A stone a month!"

"I wonder you're alive."

"Alive! I don't know that I am alive! I don't care if I'm not." And he finished the glass at a gulp while she tried to calm him.

"No, I don't!" he continued with increasing strength. "For two whole months I've fought for life. I — I've been in terror of — of the other thing! I've clutched at everything like a drowning man at a — a drowning man! Ah-h! I can't get away from this horror. It haunts me!"

And he recklessly poured out more wine.

"I should like to kill the fiends who've brought you to this," said Magdalen bitterly.

"Kill them! Kill —! Why? They're not such a bad lot really." And again he drank more. "It's — it's all infernally exaggerated — all that side of it. Why, now I remember it, even one of those — those warder fellows asked me to drink his health to-night, and — and it is to-night, isn't it? Here's to him!"

Rising to his feet he drained the glass, and it fell in pieces on the floor as he staggered forward. Magdalen then supported him gently back to the chair.

"Sit quietly, Hubert," she entreated. "You're not strong enough to — Try to stay quite quiet for a little — while I talk to you. I want to talk to you. You have only to listen. We must fight to forget all that is past, you and I. We have to start afresh — begin all over again."

Her tone was one of exquisite gentleness, and he looked out before him strangely.

"Start — afresh?" he muttered.

"Yes — from to-night."

"How — how can I do that?"

"Not alone, I know."

His breathing became quicker as he looked at her fearfully.

"Magdalen!" he cried. "What do you mean?"

"Only that two months ago here — in this room — you asked me if we couldn't start afresh."

"That was two months ago," was his excited answer. "I was stronger then! I was different then! I was another man! I didn't see myself! I didn't know myself!"

"And I refused, Hubert."

"And you were right. My God, you were right!"

"At any rate I shouldn't be now. Listen, Hubert — listen. I — I have to repent too."

She placed her hands tenderly upon his arms.

"You repent!" he cried. "What for?"

"I don't think I've helped you enough. Things might have been different if I had been different."

"You're mad," he shouted. "You don't know what you're saying."

"Hubert," she went on, clutching him, "the past is buried."

"The past!"

"Yes, and for ever, in my eyes. I'll paint it as black as you like. I'll spare you nothing, if you wish. But it's buried. Try to understand me, won't you? I — I'm sorry if I've ever been hard — unsympathetic — or anything like that. But I've tried to undo it — these two months. I've tried to undo it. You — you don't know what they've been to me; the waiting, the agony of suspense, the gaze of every eye upon me, a figure pointed at whenever it dared to venture

out, an object of pity, curiosity — and everything that's unendurable. But I probably deserved it."

He tried to stop her, but it was impossible.

"I told you," she rushed on, "that it would require a great something from outside to rekindle the sympathy between us. Hubert, hasn't it come? Whatever I had to suffer I suffered for *you* because I knew the cruelty of the charge. I knew it was a lie! I knew it would be *proved* a lie!"

"Yes, I've been found innocent! Innocent!" And he laughed foolishly.

"At times I felt I could bear no more, Hubert, that I should go mad. But there was one thing that kept me sane; that was the thought of *your* suffering. Mine was nothing. One great thing stood out before me — the thought of *you*. I revolted against it — against the injustice of it all, the infamy. It was only a devil who could send it! But you're innocent," she cried out vehemently through her sobs. "You're proved to be innocent, as I knew you to be. And, Hubert, you've expiated all that is past. You've atoned for all!"

Her outburst was unbearable to him. He could endure no more. Every word she uttered stabbed him! She was too good to be near him! He sprang up wildly from the chair with her hands holding him, and then shrieked out as he threw her from him:

"No, no! *I did it!*"

CHAPTER XXXIII

WHEN Adye left them together he met Gurney and Celia in the hall, and they went to the library, where Rate gave them an excited description of the scene at the Old Bailey when the verdict was returned. How, when the words "not guilty" were uttered by the foreman, Ware fell back into the arms of the warders, how there was such a burst of cheering that had never before been heard in an English Court of justice, and how the crowd in the street took it up. The mob had gone mad. Ware was a popular favourite with the large sporting element assembled, and they intended to give vent to their feelings. And Rate was right. It was an unparalleled demonstration.

"Hubby Ware! Three cheers for Hubby Ware!" they yelled. "Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah! And don't forget 'is lady! Three cheers for 'er, boys! Hurrah!" And the street thundered with the roar.

No one who witnessed the scene will ever forget it. And when at last Ware drove off exhausted in a taxi-cab almost in the arms of Rate, the vehicle was surrounded and then pursued by the shouting roughs. Only one actor in the drama was accorded a different reception. That was Inspector Watkin who, on being recognized at an entrance, was greeted with groans. Advancement had slipped from him at the finish, and he showed it in his face. Yet Inspector Watkin was right. Ware was guilty, and Magdalen now knew it. And upon this charge, according to the law of England, he was a free man for ever.

The terrible revelation nearly killed Magdalen. She reeled against a chair which she clutched automatically for support, and remained where she was like a figure of stone unable to move. She was stunned. Not a sound came from her but the chattering of her teeth and a fight for breath. No creature's reason has ever been so near to snapping. She stood

there transfixed, as if nailed to the floor, and her eyes stared out into vacancy from her death-like face. Ware peered at her wildly. His look was half-sober, half-mad, but terror underlay it. And he laughed mirthlessly.

"What's—what's up, eh?" he whispered while he waited vainly for an answer. "Don't stare at me like that!" And he went nearer to her. "What—what have I—? What have I said? Can't you answer? I—I'm not myself. I—I'm drunk." And he still waited. "Do you hear me? I'm drunk."

She shook violently, but no word came. With her eyes closed in agony she moved her head slowly and unbelievably in a dazed fashion from side to side, and then with the feeblest movement of her hand she tried to point to the door.

Abject terror seized hold of the man and he took her roughly by the wrist.

"What are you going to do?" he cried fearfully, but she remained still. "Answer me, will you?—Will you tell?—Answer me!—Will you tell?"

But she merely shook her head.

"Yes, you *will* tell," he exclaimed. "My guilt is stamped all over your face. You'll never live this lie!"

Then lifting her hands mechanically she smoothed them down her face as if to clear it of something. She meant that the world must never know.

The next instant Ware inconsequently grabbed a cigarette from the table and lighted it as he stared at her. He then took a fiendish delight in setting fire to all the matches in the stand and watching them flare up. And he laughed hideously like a madman.

"But tell, if you like," he shrieked. "They can't touch me, they can't touch me! I'm free—free! I've won! I've cheated them! Ha! ha! ha!" Then waving his cigarette in the air he rushed into the dining-room and slammed the door behind him. The noise seemed to restore Magdalen's consciousness to some extent. She stood alone where she was, and tried to form some words. The struggle was desperate, and she relieved her feelings momentarily by one agonized cry which she quickly smothered in fear. She beat

her forehead with her closed fists in her fight to think what to do, and, feeling the heat of the room, staggered to the window and threw it open. A burst of cheers from some of the crowd, who had chased Ware's taxi-cab, was her only greeting, and she banged the window to again, and dragged the curtains across. Then with a look of shame she buried her face in her hands, and remained crouched for some time until Celia joined her from the library.

The girl saw at once that something terrible had happened, though she little imagined what it was.

"Magdalen!" she said nervously as she watched her. "What is it?"

"Nothing!" was the faint reply, and Magdalen regarded her lifelessly.

"Yes, dear, what is it? Tell me. There's a look on your face that frightens me. It wasn't there before."

Magdalen repeated the eloquent movement of her hands upon her face as if trying to erase the look, and Celia was afraid.

"Come to bed now, darling. You need rest."

"To bed!" was the sudden answer. "No, no — not that! You needn't look at me like that. I'm perfectly sane."

A distant cheer from the street reached them.

"What's that?" whispered Magdalen.

"The crowd outside still cheering the verdict of Sir Hubert's innocence."

Magdalen stopped her ears with her fingers.

"Where's Michael? I want him!" she cried.

"To-morrow, not to-night."

"Yes, to-night — *now!*"

A string of thoughts and fears rushed through Celia's mind, and she took hold of Magdalen's hands. What possessed her? Had her mind broken under her ordeal? Had the good news come too late?

Adye entered the room at that moment. Then there was a pause while he noticed the overwrought girl go out and close the doors after her. He regarded Magdalen fixedly, sitting bent upon the sofa, and he sat down by her very seriously.

"Magdalen," he said, "I saw your husband in the hall a moment ago. Where has he gone?"

"I don't know."

"I scarcely think he was in a condition to be left."

She closed her eyes in pain.

"Magdalen," he said solemnly, "what has taken place between you and him?"

"N-n-nothing."

"What has passed between you two?" And his voice sank to a whisper.

"Nothing. I—I said nothing."

"Since I left you both in this room a few minutes ago?"

"Nothing, nothing, I tell you."

"Yes, *something* has." And he raised his voice. "And something that's damnable. It's in your face. You can't hide it from me. If you won't tell me, I'll drag it from *him!*" With that he rose to his feet, and she clung to his arm.

"No, no," she cried.

"Yes, by heaven I will! Where has he gone?"

"I—I'm afraid to think. I don't know. Stay! Stay here! If you left me at this moment I couldn't be answerable for what I—!"

He then took hold of both her hands and looked down into her eyes.

"I don't think there's any need for you to tell me," he whispered.

"What—what have I said?"

"You've said nothing."

"This—this has robbed me of my reason, Michael, I believe."

"Oh!"

"I—I'm weak—weak as a child. But I—I want to do right if—I can."

"What *are* you going to do?" And he held her hand passionately.

"I—I don't know. I must think—if I *can* think. Help me, will you? You're strong and good, Michael, and you're the only friend like that I have to lean upon."

"Magdalen," he cried out, "if I offend you, forgive me. But I can't disguise my feelings any longer. For years I've been the friend to you, and played the friend, fighting to hide from you what was behind it, and worst of all, fighting with myself — yes, myself! Month after month, year in and year out, the struggle has gone on — the struggle to master *myself*, the struggle every man goes through who loves beyond his reach, the struggle to crush his very weakness! But everything has conspired to make me fail, and I *have* failed like many another before me!"

"Michael —!" she cried, as she struggled to resist.

"Yes, failed! and now at the end of these four years I'm more hopelessly beaten than I was when they began!"

She tried to stand up, but he prevented her.

"Let me go, Michael, let me go."

"My love for you was only born then. I hadn't admitted it to myself before. It was the news of your coming marriage that gave it birth. That stabbed me, Magdalen, and I found I loved a woman with all my soul."

He still held her firmly as she fought to get away. The great precipice was even nearer than it was at Wilbury.

"Then I kept away," he went on passionately. "It was because I loved you! After a time I returned because I couldn't keep away any longer. It was because I loved you! The — the ghastly accidents of life plotted and schemed to make my feeling for you indescribable — your marriage with a man who wasn't fit for you!"

"Don't — don't, Michael!"

"Yes, I'll say it now if I never see you again! He was utterly incapable of valuing the prize he'd won — and I looked on at a tragedy. *I'm looking at it now!* He brought ruin on you mercilessly — relentlessly! He cheated you of your life! He cheated you of everything! He's made your existence a hell! He's brought you to *this!* And I could kill him for it!"

"Don't — don't tell me any more!"

"Do you think the only feeling for you kindled in me by all this has been one of sympathy and friendship? It's been love all the time! You're all-compelling! I'm held down

by you powerlessly! I *love* you, Magdalen; I *adore* you!"

He took her for the first time in his arms madly, and if she rested in them for a second, who is going to blame her? Then she wrenched herself away with a cry.

"Ah, forgive me if I've offended," he said. "This crisis in your life made me blurt it out! It *forced* me!"

"You — you don't offend me, Michael," came the gentle answer.

"Tell me, then," he whispered, as he took one of her hands, "tell me you — care for me."

"You — you know I — care for you."

"That you love me." She was silent. "That you *love* me!"

She looked up at him with almost a child-like frankness as she answered quietly:

"Yes — I love you."

In another instant she would have been clasped in his arms again beyond recall had not she held up her hand to stay him.

"No — no, Michael!" she cried.

"You've said it! Let us, for God's sake, join our lives, and I'll give you all the happiness you've been robbed of. I'll give you *everything*!"

"There would be no happiness in that," she answered sadly. "There never has been in dishonour."

"Dishonour! It's dishonour to remain! We can defy the world."

"The world won't be defied. You of all men can't defy it, and I'm not going to let you try!"

"You shan't think of *me*!"

"I *will* think of you. This would wreck your career utterly — irretrievably —"

"My career!" And he snapped his fingers as many another man has done.

"Yes, and a great one. I won't be the woman to blast it openly, and I won't *slink* away."

There was a pause. He stepped towards her with love and reverence in his eyes. No words could depict the admiration in his face as he looked upon her. And then

through her tears she added: "There — there is my final answer for your sake and for mine. And Michael — it's because I love you."

So that, when on the brink of the great abyss, she did what not every woman would, or could have done. "If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small."

But during this great temptation, in another part of the house the other side of the drama was being played.

When Ware passed through into the dining-room with his cigarette he did not remain there long. He came out wildly into the hall where Adye had caught sight of him. And then he dashed up the stairs. A footman met him there, and was terrified by what he saw. A mad stare was in his eyes, and his movements were supernaturally quick and powerful. When he reached the window upon the half-landing he stopped and looked at it foolishly, and took the curtain in his hand. Its texture amused him, and made him laugh harshly. The next instant he pressed his cigarette upon the silk lightly, and made it smoulder. It was a wonderful game to see the hole it made. He chuckled as he left it, and dashed past the footman back into the hall. When he was there the front-door was opened, and a cheer from without made him laugh again. The bell had been answered, and Tommy Bold hurried into the hall.

"I *must* see you," said the bookmaker hoarsely.

And Ware laughed loudly on seeing him.

Bold opened the dining-room door, and the two passed into the room when the door was immediately closed again.

"I had — to come and see you," gasped the bookmaker as he wrung Ware's hand, who chuckled foolishly as he looked at him. "I saved you! I saved you! I told you at the time I'd never forget what you did for me. And — and I didn't forget! But I was nearly caught by that Attorney-General. Yes, he nearly had me! It was you I saw in the punt — *you!* But I was too sharp for the Attorney-General, eh? Jupiter! he's clever, though. He nearly got me over the newspapers. Why, after I came out from gaol I got hold of 'em *all*, and made up my story! But I've saved you,

and that's all I care for! I want nothing for it, though. Not a bob! You'll never see me again. Good-bye!"

The next moment he was in the hall, and Ware with an awful stare in his eyes followed him. As the bookmaker reached the front-door he turned round.

"Go up to one of the windows," he cried. "The crowd outside want to see you, and give you a cheer! I'll tell them you're going to!"

With that he was in the street, and in a flash Ware raced up the two flights of stairs to his room. The light was burning in it, and the men in the street saw the hero of the hour rush to his open window.

"There he is!" shouted Tommy Bold.

And the little crowd roared out a welcome with their hats in the air:

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!"

Ware sprang wildly up to the low sill, and looked down upon his admirers.

"Blast you!" he shrieked. "*Clear out of the light, you bloody fools!*"

Then he fell with an awful thud below, and there came a scream from the crowd. Eustace Ede was avenged.

At the inquest a verdict of suicide while temporarily insane was very properly returned. The evidence as to Ware's conduct upon that terrible night was conclusive. No point had to be stretched by the jury. It was never disputed. The warders in his prison were not surprised. Thus ended a tragedy. The world never knew that Ware was guilty. The universal view was that the strain of his trial proved too great after his grave illness, and that the revulsion of feeling when he secured his freedom was too severe for his brain to support. The sympathy for Magdalen was profound, and many waverers thought afterwards that the sufferings of the man were proof of his innocence. They argued that guilty people are always callous. But we are all very wise about these things. The world would not be the world if everybody in it was alike. Probably we differ as much psychologically as we do physically. Be this as it may, providence

ordained Ware's end kindly. It is the living whom we must think of, and if it had been decreed differently, Magdalen's life would have been piteous beyond measure.

It is not every woman who would have acted as she acted in such a stupendous crisis. An infinitely smaller excuse than she had would have weighed with many another. But she had her ideals. Through storm and stress she fought to cling to them. Youth and beauty might fade, but honour was imperishable.

As to Ware's crime it was an example of many that go unpunished. Further, it was an example of many crimes in all walks of life which are never even suspected. Also, what he himself said was true, and what Sir Henry Egerton at Wilbury pointed out that, after the return of the verdict at his trial, he could have proclaimed his guilt to the whole world without a man being able to touch him. It is a strange reflection, but it is a fact. Whether it is right or whether it is wrong, it is the law we live under. And until it is altered, if ever it is considered wise or just to alter it, we must abide by it.

However, we may be thankful that Magdalen was spared any such disclosure, as we may feel content that she faithfully carried her secret with her through the happy life which she found at last after years of sorrow.

All prophecies as to Michael Adye's future were being fulfilled. Within two years he became Attorney-General in the new Government. And not long after his appointment, which was hailed with satisfaction by the Bar, there appeared an announcement in the newspapers that he and Magdalen were married quietly.

Within an hour of reading it, Arthur Bragson wrote to him:

"Wasn't I right about the 'good chap' turning up? May your Blue Bird and hers never fly away!"

THE END

